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PART I

I

THROUGH the open skylight in the ceiling the sun streamed into the huge studio, making a great square of brilliant blue light, a bright patch upon an infinite azure background far away, across which groups of birds were passing in rapid

flight.

But even as it entered the lofty room with its austere draperies, the glad brightness of the heavens was dulled and softened. It slept upon the upholsteries, or died away on the door curtains, hardly lighting up the dark corners, where only the gilded frames shone like fires. It seemed as though peace and sleep were imprisoned there — the peace of an artist's home, where the human soul had laboured. Between these walls, where thought lives and moves and exhausts itself in strenuous endeavour, all seems wearied and outworn as soon as it relaxes its efforts. Everything seems dead after these crowded hours of life. Everything — the furniture, the upholstering, the great personages upon the unfinished canvases — takes its rest, as if the whole room had felt the master's weariness, had toiled with him and shared each day in the renewal of the strife. A vague stifling perfume of paint and turpentine and tobacco floated in the air, retained in the carpet and the chairs. There was no sound to disturb the heavy silence, except the short, sharp cries of the swallows passing above the skylight, and the long-drawn confused murmur of Paris, scarcely heard over the roofs. Nothing moved but a little cloud of blue vapour rising intermittently towards the ceiling, as Olivier Bertin, stretched out upon his couch, emitted a puff of cigarette-smoke slowly through his lips.

His gaze was lost in the far-off sky as he sought for the subject of a new picture. What was he to paint? As yet he had no idea. He was not, moreover, a determined artist who was sure of his own mind. He was irresolute, and his inspiration continually hesitated, undecided, between all the various manifestations of his art. Rich, famous, adorned with all the honours of his profession, he was even now, in the closing years of his life, the man who does not know yet exactly towards what ideal he has toiled. He had won the prix de Rome, had defended tradition and, like so many others, had called up again the great scenes of history. Then he had modernised his tendencies, and painted living men reminiscent of the classic form. He was intelligent, enthusiastic, a worker tenacious of the changing vision. He loved his art, and was thoroughly master of it; and, thanks to the refinement of his genius, he had attained to a remarkable technical ability, and a versatility which was due partly to his hesitations and to his experiments in more than one genre. Perhaps, too, the sudden infatuation of the world at large for those works of his - elegant, distinguished, faultless in execution - had influenced his nature and prevented it from being what it would normally have become. Ever since his initial triumph, the desire to please had always been an unconscious source of anxiety to him, had secretly modified his path and weakened his convictions. This desire to please, moreover, manifested itself in his character under a variety of forms, and had

contributed much to his glory.

His charm of manner, his way of living, the care he took of his person, his old reputation as a man of strength and skill, as a fencer and rider, had formed a train of small notorieties to attend upon his growing fame. After Cléopatre, the first canvas to make him famous, Paris had become violently infatuated with him, had adopted him and fêted him; and, in a moment, he had become one of those brilliant society artists one meets in the Bois, who are discussed in the drawing-rooms and welcomed by the Institut while yet young men. He had entered there as a conquering hero, with the approval of the whole city.

In this way fortune had led him to the outskirts

of old age, petting and caressing him.

So, beneath the influence of the glorious day that he could see regnant outside, he sought for a poetical subject. His cigarette and his lunch had made him a little sleepy; and he day-dreamed, staring skywards, and sketching rapid outlines in the blue—elegant women in a path in the Bois, or on the pavement of a street, lovers at the water's edge, all the galant fancies in which his imagination found delight. The changing forms took shape in the sky, indistinct and shifting, in the pictured illusion of his eyes, and

the swallows, streaking the air like an unceasing flight of arrows, seemed trying to efface them, blotting

them out like the strokes of a pen.

He could find nothing! All the outlines thus glimpsed were just like something he had already painted. All the women that had appeared were the sisters or daughters of those his artistic fancy had conceived already. And the vague fear, which had haunted him for a year past, fear of finding himself empty, of having rung all his changes of subject, and dried up the spring of his inspiration, took clear shape in face of this review of his work and this incapability to dream of something new and discover something yet unknown.

He got up gently to look among his drawings to see if he could not find in his discarded efforts some-

thing that would wake an idea in his mind.

Still puffing at his cigarette, he began to turn over the sketches, the first rough drafts, and the pencil drawings that he kept locked up in a large old cupboard. Then, soon wearied of these fruitless searches, bruised and baffled in spirit, he threw away his cigarette, whistled a tune that everyone was singing in the street, and, bending down, picked up from beneath a chair a heavy pair of dumb-bells that lay upon the floor.

With the other hand he removed a cloth from the mirror he used for regulating the poses, verifying the perspectives and testing their truth; then he took up his stand immediately opposite it and watched

himself juggling.

He had been famous in the studios for his strength; later, in society, for his good looks; now years were beginning to weigh upon him, and make him stouter. Tall, broad-shouldered, full-chested, he had developed a corporation like an old athlete, despite the fact that he continued to fence every day and to ride assiduously. His head was still striking, as fine as it had been, though different. His short, thick, white hair lit up the black eyes under their bushy, grey brows. And his big moustache, like that of an old soldier, had remained almost dark and gave his face an unusual character of pride and energy.

Standing there before the glass, heels together, body upright, he made the cast-iron knobs go through all the regulation figures at the end of his muscular arm, whose quiet, powerful movements he contem-

plated complacently.

But suddenly, in the back of the looking-glass, where the whole studio was reflected, he saw a door-curtain move, and a woman's head appeared: just a head looking at him. A voice behind him asked: "You are at home?"

Turning round, he replied:

"Yes, I am in." Then he threw his dumb-bells on the floor, and ran towards the door with a somewhat exaggerated agility.

A woman in a thin dress entered. After they had

shaken hands, she said:

"You were taking your exercise?"

"Yes," he said, "I was playing the peacock, and let myself be caught in the act."

She laughed and answered:

"Your porter's box was empty, and, as I knew that you were always alone at this hour, I came in unannounced."

He looked at her:

"Jove! How beautiful you are and how smart!"
"Yes, I have a new dress on. Do you think it's pretty?"

"Charming! Wonderfully harmonised. Nowa-days people really have got a feeling for colour."

He walked round her, patted the material, rearranged the folds with his finger-tips, like a man with a tailor's knowledge of a woman's dress. And indeed all his life he had used his artist's imagination and his athlete's muscles to make the slender point of his brush record changing refinements of fashions, and reveal the grace of a woman's body held captive in armour of silk and velvet, or beneath a froth of laces. At length, he exclaimed:

"That is most successful. It suits you excellently." She let him admire her, glad to be pretty and to

please him.

Though no longer young, she was still beautiful. Not very tall, with a rather robust figure, she had that brilliant freshness of complexion which lends an air of ripeness to the flesh of a woman of forty. She was like one of those roses which go on blooming indefinitely until, opened out too far, they fall in an hour.

Under her fair hair she preserved the lively, youthful grace of those Parisian women who never grow old, who carry in themselves an extraordinary reserve of life, and an inexhaustible power of resistance — women who remain the same for twenty years, indestructible and triumphant, careful above all of their bodies and sparing of their health.

She lifted her veil and murmured:

"Well! Aren't you going to kiss me?" "I have just been smoking," he said.

She gave an exclamation of disgust. Then, raising her mouth towards him, she said: "Never mind."

and their lips met.

He removed her parasol and took off her light jacket with the quick, sure movements of one accustomed to this intimate action. As she sat down again on the couch, he asked with solicitude:

"Is your husband quite well?"

"Very well. He must even be speaking at the House at this very moment."

"Oh! What about?"

"No doubt about beetroots or colza-oil, as usual." Her husband, Comte de Guilleroy, member for the Eure, had made a special study of all agricultural questions.

But seeing in the corner a sketch that she did not

know, she crossed the studio and asked:

"What's that?"

"A pastel that I am starting, the portrait of the

Princesse de Pontève."

"You know," she said seriously, "if you start painting women's portraits again, I shall close your studio down. I know only too well where that sort of work leads."

"Oh, one cannot paint a portrait of Any twice in

a lifetime," he said.

"I hope not."

She examined the unfinished pastel like a woman conversant with artistic matters. She drew away from it, came near to it again, shaded her eyes with her hand, looked for the place where the sketch was

in the best light, and then pronounced herself satisfied.

"It is very good. You are very successful with

pastels."

Flattered, he murmured: "You really think so?"

"Yes, it is a delicate art, requiring an unusual artist.

It is not intended for the artisans of painting."

For twelve years she had been fostering his impulse towards high art, fighting against his lapses towards simple reality; and, by urging considerations of social elegance, she had been pushing him gently towards an ideal of grace that was somewhat mannered and unnatural.

She asked him:

"And how is the princess?"

He had to give a thousand details of every kind—those minute details in which the jealous and subtle curiosity of women finds its satisfaction, as they pass from remarks upon dress to reflections upon the intellect:

Then suddenly:

"Does she flirt with you?"

He laughed, and swore that she did not.

Then, placing both hands on the painter's shoulders, she looked at him steadily. The round pupil in the middle of the blue iris — dotted with imperceptible black spots like splashes of ink — quivered with the vehemence of her questioning.

Again she murmured:

"Really and truly she does not flirt with you?"

"Really and truly."

She went on:

"Besides, I have really no anxiety. You will love none other than me now. It is all, all, over so far as others go. It is too late, my poor friend."

He felt passing over him the slight but painful shudder that catches at the heart of oldish men when

their age is mentioned, and he murmured:

"To-day and to-morrow, as yesterday, there has not been, nor will be, any other in my life than you, Any."

She took him by the arm, and, returning towards

the couch, made him sit by her side.

"What were you thinking of?"

"I was trying to think of a subject for a picture."

"What sort of subject?"

"I don't know; that's why I am trying to think of one."

"What have you been doing these days?"

He had to tell her of all the visits he had received. of all his dinners and evening parties, his conversations and trifling little affairs. They both of them took an interest in these futile and ordinary happenings of social life. The petty rivalries, the liaisons, known or suspected, the ready-made judgments, repeated and listened to a thousand times, on the same persons, the same event, and the same opinions, caught up their minds and drowned them in that turgid and troubled stream that is called Parisian life. Knowing everyone in every sphere of life, he as the artist to whom every door was open, she as the fashionable wife of a conservative member, they were adepts at the game of French small talk polished and yet commonplace, with its pleasant malice, its futile witticisms, and its vulgar cleverness that gives a special and enviable distinction to those who have trained their tongues to this slanderous chatter.

"When are you coming to dine with me?" she

asked suddenly.

"Whenever you like. Name your day."

"Friday then. I am having the Duchesse de Mortemain, the Corbeilles, and Musadieu to celebrate the return of my small daughter who is coming home this evening. But don't tell anyone. It's a secret."

"Oh, certainly I will come. I shall be delighted to see Annette again. I have not seen her for three

years."

"No, not for three years."

Annette had been brought up first of all in her parents' house; then she became the final object of her grandmother's passionate affection. Mme. Paradin was nearly blind, and lived all the year round on her son-in-law's estate at the château de Roncières in the Eure. Gradually the old woman had come to keep the child near her more and more; and since the Guilleroys passed almost half their time on this estate, to which they were summoned by interests of every sort, agricultural and electoral, they had ended by not taking the little girl with them to Paris any more. And, for her part, she preferred the free and active life of the country to the cloistered existence of the town.

For three years she had not been there once. The comtesse preferred to keep her away, to avoid rousing new desires in her before the appointed day of "her coming out." Mme. de Guilleroy had provided

her with two governesses possessed of excellent degrees, and went often to see her mother and her daughter. Annette's stay at the castle was, moreover, practically necessitated by the presence of the old lady.

Formerly, Olivier Bertin had been in the habit of going each summer to pass six weeks or two months at Roncières; but, for three years past, attacks of rheumatism had dragged him off to remote wateringplaces, which had so strongly revived his love for Paris that, once returned, he could not bring himself

to leave it again.

Strictly the young girl should not have returned till the autumn; but her father had suddenly conceived a marriage project for her, and he had summoned her to Paris, so that she could meet at once the Marquis de Farandal, whom he thought of for her fiancé. This little arrangement was being kept quite secret; and Olivier Bertin was the sole recipient of Mme. de Guilleroy's confidences.

And so he asked:

"Then your husband's plan is quite settled?"

"Yes; and, indeed, I think it is a very happy idea."

And then they talked of other things.

She returned to the subject of painting, and wanted to make him paint a Christ. He refused, thinking there were already enough of them in the world; but she kept obstinately to her idea and began to get impatient with him.

"Oh! If only I could draw I would show you my thought. It would be something very original and very bold. He is being taken down from the Cross, and the man who has unfastened His hands lets go all the upper part of His body. He falls headlong into the crowd, who raise their arms to receive Him

and bear Him up. Do you understand?"

Yes, he understood. He even found the idea original; but he felt himself in a mood for modernity; and as his mistress lay stretched out on the couch with one delicately shod foot hanging down, the naked flesh gleaming through the almost trans-

parent stocking, he exclaimed:

"Wait a minute! Here is what I must paint! Here is real life; a woman's foot beneath the hem of a dress! One can put everything in that, truth, desire, poetry. There is nothing prettier or more graceful than a woman's foot! — It has mystery, too: the leg hidden, lost, and guessed at beneath this stuff."

He sat down Turk-wise on the floor, took hold of the shoe and drew it off; and the foot, relieved of its leathern sheath, moved about like a little, restless animal, surprised to be left free.

Bertin continued:

"Delicate, aristocratic, and yet material — more material than the hand. Show me your hand, Any."

She was wearing long gloves that reached to the elbow. To take one off she took hold of it right at the end and swiftly slid it down her arm, turning it back as one does when skinning a snake. The arm appeared pale, plump and round. It had been uncovered so quickly that one thought involuntarily of complete and unashamed nakedness.

Then she stretched out her hand, letting it hang down at the end of her wrist. The rings shone upon

her white fingers; and her finely tapering rosecoloured nails looked like passionate claws growing at the end of this tiny, woman's hand.

Olivier Bertin touched it gently, admiring it. He worked the fingers as though they had been toys of

flesh; then he said:

"What a funny, funny thing! What a pretty little hand! Clever and intelligent, making everything we want — books, lace, houses, pyramids, steamengines, pastries, and — best of all its tasks — caressing us."

He took the rings off one by one; and when the wedding-ring, a simple band of gold, fell off in its

turn, he murmured with a smile:

"The law. Let us do reverence."

"Stupid," she said. His remark jarred slightly

upon her.

He had always been something of a mocker, possessed of that French tendency to mingle an appearance of irony with the deepest emotions. Often he gave her pain unwittingly, not being able to grasp the subtle distinctions women make, or to discern, as she said, the boundaries of the holy places. Particularly she was annoyed when he spoke with a shade of familiar raillery of their long relationship, which he declared to be the most beautiful example of love in the nineteenth century. She asked after a silence:

"You are taking us, aren't you, to see the varnishing, Annette and me?"

"Oh, certainly."

Then she asked him about the best pictures in the next Salon, which was to open in a fortnight.

But suddenly, reminded perhaps of a forgotten errand:

"Come, give me my shoe," she exclaimed. "I

am going."

He was toying dreamily with the tiny shoe, turning

it over and over absent-mindedly in his hands.

He bent down, kissed the foot that seemed to float between dress and carpet, motionless, a little chilled by the air: then put on the shoe. Mme. de Guilleroy got up and walked towards the table where lay papers and opened letters of old and recent date, next to an artist's inkstand, where the ink was all dried up. She looked at the scene with an interested eve. touched the pieces of paper and lifted them up to look underneath.

He came close to her.

"You are upsetting all my disarray," he said.

Without replying she asked:

"Who is this gentleman who wants to buy your Baigneuses?"

"An American. I don't know him."

"Have you settled about the Chanteuse des Rues?"

"Yes. Ten thousand francs."

"You have done well. It was pleasing, but nothing out of the way. Good-bye, my dear."

She offered him her cheek, which he brushed lightly with a gentle kiss. Then she disappeared behind the door-curtain, after saying in a low tone:

"Friday, at eight o'clock. No, I don't want you to take me home. You know that quite well. Good-

bve."

After she had gone, he lit a cigarette, then began

to walk slowly up and down his studio. The whole history of his relationship with her passed before his mind's eye. He recalled remote details that he had forgotten, and linked them together as he evoked them, taking a solitary pleasure in this pursuit of his memories.

It was when he had just risen, star-like, on the horizon of artistic Paris, at the time when the painters had monopolised all the popular favour and inhabited a quarter full of magnificent mansions won by a few strokes of the brush.

After his return from Rome in 1864 Bertin had remained for some years without success or fame. Then, suddenly, in 1868, he exhibited his *Cléopatre*, and was raised to the clouds in a few days by critics

and public alike.

In 1872, after the war, and after the death of Henri Regnault had set his brother artists, as it were, upon a pedestal of glory, his Jocaste put Bertin among the company of the audacious; it was a daring subject, but the restrained originality of his execution made it none the less acceptable to Academicians. In 1873 the first prize that he received for the Juive d'Alger exhibited after his return from travelling in Africa, raised him beyond competition; and, after a portrait he made of the Princesse de Sabia in 1874, he was regarded in the fashionable world as the first portrait-painter of his age. From that day he became the adored painter of the fashionable Parisian lady - of all fashionable Parisian ladies - the most skilful and ingenious interpreter of their grace, their figures, and their characters. In a few months all the well-known women in Paris came to beg the

favour of being painted by him. He displayed a

certain reluctance and charged enormous fees.

Now, since he was in the fashion and paid visits like an ordinary society man, he met one day at the house of the Duchesse de Mortemain a young woman in deep mourning. She was just leaving as he came in, and as he met her in the doorway he was ravished by a delightful vision of grace and elegance. He asked her name, and learnt that she was the Comtesse de Guilleroy, wife of a Norman Squire, an agriculturist and a member of the Chambre, that she was in mourning for her father-in-law, and that she was witty and very much admired and sought after.

Still stirred by the apparition that had captured

his artist's eye, he said immediately:

"There's a woman whose portrait I would gladly

paint."

His remark was repeated to the young woman the next day; and he received that very evening a little, blue-tinted note, very slightly scented, written in a delicate regular hand, sloping upwards a little from left to right.

"DEAR SIR,

"The Duchesse de Mortemain has just left me and assures me that you would be ready to make with my poor face one of your masterpieces. I would entrust it to you with pleasure, if I were certain that you had not just thrown out a random remark, and that you do see in me something capable of being copied and idealised by you.

"Believe me, dear Sir,
"Yours very truly,
"Anne de Guilleroy."

He replied, asking when he might wait upon the comtesse; and he received a very simple note asking

him to lunch on the following Monday.

It was on the first floor, Boulevard Malesherbes, in a large and luxurious modern house. After crossing a huge drawing-room hung in blue silk framed in wood of white and gold, the painter was shown into a sort of boudoir draped with the bright gay tapestries of the last century—those tapestries in the style of Watteau, with their delicate shades and graceful subjects, that seem as though they had been designed and executed, made in their entirety, by workmen lost in a day-dream.

He had just sat down when the comtesse appeared. She trod so lightly that he had not heard her cross the next room, and he was surprised to see her. She gave him her hand as though he were a friend.

"Then it is true that you would really like to paint

my portrait?"

"I should be very happy to do it, madam."

Her tight-fitting black dress made her look very slender; gave her an air of youth and yet of seriousness, which was belied by the smiling face lit up by her fair hair. The comte came in, leading by the hand a little girl of six.

Mme. de Guilleroy introduced him.

"My husband."

He was a short man with no moustache and hollow cheeks, showing dark under the skin where the beard had been shaved off.

He looked rather like a priest or an actor, with his long hair brushed back and his polished manners; while about his mouth two deep circular wrinkles ran from his cheeks to his chin, that might have been

formed by habitual speaking in public.

He thanked the painter with a profusion of phrase that revealed the orator. For a long time he had wanted to have his wife's portrait painted, and assuredly it was M. Olivier Bertin he would have chosen, if he had not been afraid he would decline, for he knew how harassed he was by requests.

So it was arranged with much exchange of compliments on either side that he should bring the comtesse to the studio the next day. He wondered, however, whether it would not be better, on account of her deep mourning, to wait awhile; but the painter declared that he wanted to get on to his canvas the first impression he had received, the striking contrast between the lively delicate face shining under her golden hair and the austere black of her dress.

So she came the next day with her husband, and on the following days with her daughter, whom they

put upon a table covered with picture-books.

Olivier Bertin as usual was very reserved. Society women made him a little nervous, for he scarcely knew them. He supposed them to be at once unmoral and stupid, hypocritical and dangerous, futile and hampering. He had had, among the women of the demi-monde, certain short-lived adventures due to his name, to his wit, his elegant athletic figure and his bronzed, eager face. And so he preferred them. He liked their freedom of behaviour and of conversation, accustomed as he was to the queer, gay, easy-going manners of the studios and greenrooms that he frequented. He went into society to satisfy his ambition, not his heart. It appealed to

his vanity; and he accepted congratulations and commands, and showed off before the fair ladies who showered compliments upon him, without ever attempting to flirt with them. He never allowed himself to make in their presence a daring joke or a risky remark, considering them all prudes, and was thought very good form. On every occasion that one of them had come to sit at his studio, he had been conscious, in spite of the efforts she made to please him, of that disparity of race which bars any real union between artists and men and women of the world, even though they mix with one another. Behind the smiles and the admiration, which with women is always a little artificial, he could divine the secret mental reservation of the person conscious of being of a superior substance. The result was that his pride received a shock. His manners took on an almost haughty deference. And side by side with the hidden vanity of the novus homo who is treated as an equal by princes and princesses rose the feeling of self-esteem of a man who owes to his intelligence a place on a par with that accorded to others by reason of their birth. People said of him with a touch of surprise: "He is extremely wellmannered." This surprise flattered and hurt him at the same time; since it indicated their recognition of a barrier.

The painter's deliberately ceremonious seriousness was a little trying to Mme. de Guilleroy; she did not know what to say to this unbending man, who had a reputation for wit.

After settling her little daughter, she came and sat down on an arm-chair near the sketch already

begun, and strove to do as the artist told her, and give her face some sort of expressiveness.

Towards the middle of the fourth sitting, he sud-

denly stopped painting and asked her:

"What gives you most pleasure in life?"

She hesitated, embarrassed.

"I really don't know. Why this question?"

"I want to see a happy thought in those eyes; and I have not seen it yet."

"Try and make me talk then. I like to chatter."

"You are a light-hearted person, are you?"

"Oh! very."

"Let us talk then, madam."

He had said: "Let us talk, madam," very gravely. Then, beginning to paint again, he touched on a variety of subjects, trying to discover some point upon which they might find themselves in harmony. They began by exchanging reflections upon people they knew, then they talked of themselves — always the pleasantest topic of conversation and the one which most easily brings people together.

When they met the next day, they felt themselves more at ease; and Bertin, seeing that he pleased and amused her, began to tell her some details of his life as an artist and unburdened himself of his memories with that fanciful play of wit which was his peculiar

charm.

Accustomed as she was to the formal witticisms of fashionable men of letters, she was surprised by this rather mad whimsicality, which said things straight out, and illuminated them with a touch of irony. And suddenly she began to reply in kind with a fine-edged and daring grace.

Within a week she had conquered him and captured his heart by her good humour, her frankness and simplicity. He had quite forgotten his prejudices against society women, and would readily have declared that they alone possess charm and attraction. As he painted, standing before his canvas, advancing and drawing back like a man fighting, he poured out his most intimate thoughts, as though he had known for a long time this pretty fair-haired woman in black, made of sunshine and mourning, who sat before him and smiled as she listened to him, and answered him gaily, and so vivaciously that she was always losing her pose.

Now he would go away from her, close one eye and lean forward trying to catch the whole effect of his model; and now come quite near to remark the slightest shades, the most fleeting expressions of her face, to seize and convey all that there is in a woman's countenance more than the outward seeming—that emanation of ideal beauty, that reflection of something unknown, the intimate and terrible charm that distinguishes a woman from all other women, makes one man love her to distraction, and

leaves another unmoved.

One afternoon the little girl came and planted herself before the canvas with all a child's seriousness, and asked:

"That's mummy, isn't it?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her, flattered by this artless homage to the likeness of his work.

Another day, she seemed very quiet and suddenly they heard her say in a sad little voice:

"Mummy, I am bored."

And the painter was so touched by this, the first complaint she had made, that the next day he had a whole shopful of toys brought to the studio.

Little Annette, surprised, happy, and always deliberate, put them very carefully in order so that she could play with them one after another as the whim seized her.

Ever after receiving that present, she loved the painter, as children do love, with the animal caressing affection that makes them so delightful and so winning.

Mme. de Guilleroy began to enjoy the sittings more and more. She had very little to do that winter, being in mourning; and so, society and parties being denied her, she centred upon the studio all her interest in life.

She was the daughter of a rich and hospitable Paris merchant who had died many years ago and of a woman who was a perpetual invalid and kept to her bed for her health six months out of twelve. When quite young, she had become complete mistress of the house, able to receive people, to smile and talk - a good judge of persons, knowing the right thing to say to each one, moving through life with an easy assurance, clear-sighted and versatile. When the Comte de Guilleroy was brought forward as her future husband, she realised at once the advantages she would derive from the marriage: and she accepted them readily like a prudent girl, well aware that you can't have everything, and that you must weigh up the good and bad in each particular case.

Once launched upon society, she was sought after

for her beauty and her wit; several men laid siege to her heart, she suffered them without once losing the tranquillity of her heart, which was as well

governed as was her intellect.

She flirted, but with an aggressive and prudent coquettishness that never went too far. Compliments pleased her. She was flattered by her power to rouse desires, provided she could seem to ignore them. And when, throughout a whole evening in a drawing-room, she had felt the incense of adoration rising to her, she slept well, like a woman who has accomplished her mission upon earth. This existence, which had now lasted for seven years, without tiring her or seeming monotonous (for she loved the never-ending social rush), still left her odd moments when she felt a desire for other things. The men who surrounded her - lawyers, politicians, financiers or clubmen with nothing to do - rather amused her, like so many actors; and she did not take them too seriously, for all that she respected their offices, ranks and titles.

The painter pleased her first of all because he gave her something new. She liked being in the studio, laughed whole-heartedly, felt that she was being witty and was grateful to him for the pleasure she derived from the sittings. She liked him also because he was handsome, strong and famous; for no woman, however much she may pretend, is indifferent to physical beauty and fame. Flattered at having been noticed by this expert and disposed to judge him very favorably in her turn, she had discovered in him an alert and cultured mind, refinement, imagination, a real intellectual charm and a

vividness of language that seemed to throw a flood

of light on everything she expressed.

Their intimacy grew swiftly; and every day something more of their hearts seemed to enter into the handshake they gave one another when she came in.

Then without any premeditation, without any deliberate design, she felt growing in her the natural desire to win him to her; and she yielded to it. She had provided for nothing, arranged nothing. She simply flirted with him, only more delicately than usual, as a woman instinctively does with a man she likes more than other men. And into all her behaviour towards him, into her looks and smiles, she infused the seductive grace that a woman who has been roused to a desire to be loved spreads around her like bird-lime.

She said flattering things to him which meant: "I like you very much," and she would make him talk for a long time, so as to show him as she listened how much he interested her. He would stop painting and come to sit near her. And in that mental excitement which is roused by the intoxicating knowledge of being found pleasing, he would have sudden impulses to poetry or humour or philosophy, as the mood seized him.

She liked it when he was gay; when he was profound, she tried to follow the train of his thought without always succeeding. And when she was thinking of something else she had every appearance of listening with an air of having understood so well and of so much enjoying this initiation, that it inspired him to watch her as she listened, rejoiced as he

was to have discovered a frank, delicate, and docile

mind, into which his thoughts fell like seeds.

The portrait progressed and was pronounced very satisfactory. For the painter had attained that emotional state necessary for the discovery of all his model's characteristics and for their expression with that ardour of conviction which is the inspiration of a fine artist.

Leaning towards her and noting the movements of her face, the varied tints of her flesh, the shades of her skin, the expressions and the limpid depths of her eyes, all the secrets of her physiognomy, he had become impregnated with her as a sponge fills out with water. And as he transmitted to his canvas the emanation of her disquieting charm, seized by his eye and flowing like a wave from his brain to his brush, it stunned him, went to his head as if he had drunk of woman's loveliness.

She felt him being captivated by her, and was amused at this game, at the victory growing more and more certain; she began to be excited by it herself.

Something new was giving a new savour to her life, and awakening in her a mysterious joy. When she heard his name mentioned, her heart beat a little faster, and she felt a desire — one of those desires that never attain expression — to say: "He is in love with me." She was pleased when people eulogised his genius, and perhaps still more pleased when they thought him handsome. When she thought about him all alone, without tiresome people to bother her, she thought she had really made a good friend in this man, who would continue to be content with a warm handshake.

As for him, he often laid his palette down on the stool, quite suddenly in the middle of a sitting, to go and take little Annette in his arms, and tenderly kiss her eyes or hair, while looking at her mother, as though to say: "It is you and not the child that I am kissing."

Now and then Mme. de Guilleroy came alone without her daughter. And then there was less work

done, and more conversation.

One afternoon she was late. It was cold, being at the end of February. Olivier had come home early, as he always did whenever she was to come, hoping that she would arrive before her time. As he waited for her, he walked up and down smoking, and asked himself, surprised to find himself putting the same question for the hundredth time in a week: "Can it be that I am in love?" He did not know, never having been really in love before. He had had certain ardent fancies which had even lasted quite a long time; but he had never mistaken them for love. To-day he was astonished at his feelings.

Did he love her? In truth, he did not exactly desire her, having never contemplated the possibility of possessing her. Up till now, as soon as he found a woman pleasing, desire had seized him at once, made him reach out his hands towards her, as a man might to pluck a fruit, but his inmost thoughts had never been much moved by her absence or her presence.

Desire for this woman had hardly touched him, and then had seemed wiped out, hidden behind another and more powerful emotion, still obscure and scarcely awakened. Olivier had thought that love began by reveries and moods of poetic exaltation.

But what he felt seemed, on the contrary, to proceed from an indefinable emotion, physical rather than spiritual. He was nervy, strung up and restless as we are when some malady is taking root in us. Yet no pain accompanied this feverishness of his, which by its contagion troubled his thoughts too. He was aware that this disquietude was caused by Mme. de Guilleroy, by the memory that she left him and by the expectation of her return. He did not feel himself flung towards her by an impulsion of his whole being; but he felt her always present within him, as though she had never left him. When she went away she left behind her something of herself, something subtle and inexpressible. What? Was it love? Now, he went down into his own heart to see and to understand. He found her delightful, but she did not correspond to that type of ideal womanhood that his blind hope had created. Whosoever summons love to him has decided already the spiritual qualities and the physical gifts of her who will win him; and Mme. Guilleroy, although he found her infinitely pleasing, did not seem to him to be that woman.

But why did she thus occupy his thoughts, more than the others, and differently, and incessantly?

Had he just fallen into the snare that her coquettishness had spread for him, and that he had scented and understood long ago? Had he been circumvented by her manœuvres and fallen a victim to that peculiar fascination given to women by their will to please?

He walked about, sat down, got up again, lit cigarettes and immediately threw them away again; and

every moment he kept looking at the hand of the clock moving slowly and inevitably towards the usual hour.

Several times already, he had been on the point of lifting with his finger-nail the convex glass just covering the turning golden arrows, and pushing the large one with his finger to the number it was so leisurely approaching.

It seemed to him as though that would be enough to make the door open and the expected guest appear, at once deceived and summoned by this trick. Then he started to laugh at this childish and un-

reasonable wish.

At last he asked himself: "Can I become her lover?" The idea appeared to him strange, almost impracticable, and hardly capable of realisation because of the complications it would bring into his life.

However, the woman attracted him greatly and he concluded: "There's no doubt about it; I'm in a

queer state of mind."

The clock struck the hour, and the sound made him start, disturbing his nerves rather than his soul. He waited for her with that impatience which is increased by every second of waiting. She was always punctual, so he would see her come in before ten minutes was up. When the ten minutes had gone, he felt himself tortured as by the imminence of a great sorrow, then annoyed because she was making him lose his time, and then he suddenly realised that if she did not come he would be very greatly distressed. What should he do? He would wait for her! No — he would go out so that, if by any chance she

did arrive very late, she would find the studio

empty.

He would go out; but when? How much latitude should he allow her? Would it not be better to stay and make her understand by a few coldly polite words that he was not one of those people who could be kept waiting? And if she did not come? Then he would get a telegram or a note perhaps? Or else a servant or a messenger would come? Supposing she did not come, what was he to do? It was a day lost: he could not work any more. And so? And so he would go and inquire after her, for he needed to see her.

It was true; he needed to see her — a profound, oppressive, torturing need. What was the meaning of it? Was it love? But he felt neither exaltation of spirit nor excitement of the senses nor any dreamy rapture of the soul, in realising that if she did not come that day, he would be deeply distressed.

The street bell sounded on the staircase of the little house, and Olivier Bertin felt himself suddenly rather breathless, then so joyful that he pirouetted

as he threw his cigarette away.

She came in, alone.

Suddenly he became very bold.

"Do you know what I was wondering as I waited for you?"

"No."

"I was wondering whether I was not in love with you."

"In love with me! You are going mad."

But she smiled and her smile said: "That is very nice. I am so glad."

She went on:

"Come, you are not serious. Why do you joke like this?"

He answered:

"On the contrary, I am very serious. I do not say that I am actually in love with you, but I wonder if I am not by way of becoming so."

"What makes you think that?"

"My anxiety when you are not here, and my delight when you come."

She sat down:

"Oh! don't distress yourself for such slight cause. So long as you sleep well and eat your dinner with a good appetite there will be no danger."

He began to laugh.

"And if I can neither sleep nor eat?"

"Then let me know of it."

"And then?"

"I will let you get well in peace."

"Thank you."

And all the afternoon they played lightly with the subject of this love. It was the same the following days. Accepting it as a witty whimsicality and a thing of no importance, she asked him good-humouredly as she came in:

"How is your love to-day?"

And he told her, with a mixture of levity and seriousness, all the stages of the sickness, all the intimate, continual, and deep-rooted travail of an affection that is born and grows. He analysed himself minutely to her hour by hour since they had separated the day before, in the jocular way of a professor delivering a lecture. And she listened interested, a

little touched, a little disquieted too by this story that seemed the story of a novel in which she was the heroine. When, with an air of detachment, he had enumerated all the cares to which he had become a prey, his voice would sometimes tremble as by a word or simply by an intonation he expressed all the pain of his heart.

And ever she questioned him, tense with curiosity, her eyes fixed upon him, and her ears greedy for those words that are rather disquieting to hear, but very pleasant to the listener.

Sometimes as he came near to her to correct her pose, he took her hand and tried to kiss it. But she would snatch her fingers from his lips and, knitting

her brows, say:

"Come, get on with your work!"

He would begin to work again, but before five minutes had elapsed she would ask some question that brought him back cleverly to the only subject that interested them.

She began to be a little afraid in her heart. Now, she wanted very much to be loved, but not too much loved. Confident that she would not be carried away, she was afraid of letting him adventure too far, and afraid of losing him, if she were forced to condemn him to despair after having seemed to encourage him. And yet, if she were compelled to give up this tender, playful friendship, this running stream of talk that bore love in its current like the river whose sand is charged with gold, she would have been very sorrowful, with a sorrow that tore her heart.

When she left her house to go to the artist's studio

a swift, warm ecstasy surged through her, and made her gay and light-hearted. As she placed her hand on the bell of Olivier's house, her heart beat impatiently, and the carpet on his staircase was the softest her feet had ever trod.

But Bertin used to get gloomy, a little nervy and

often irritable.

He had his moments of exasperation, immediately repressed, but frequent.

One day, just after she had come in, he sat down by her instead of starting to paint and said to her:

"Mme. de Guilleroy, you must realise now that it

is no joke, that I am madly in love with you."

This beginning frightened her; and, seeing the dreaded crisis approach, she tried to stop him, but he no longer listened to her. His heart was overflowing; and she had to hear him, pale, trembling and full of anxiety. He spoke for a long time, asking for nothing, tenderly, sorrowfully, with a resigned sadness. And she let him take her hands, which he kept in his. He had knelt down before she could prevent him, and, looking at her like a man in a dream, begged her not to hurt him! Hurt him? She did not understand him, did not try to understand him. She was numbed by a bitter sorrow at seeing him in pain, sorrow that was akin to joy. Suddenly she saw tears in his eyes: she was touched and exclaimed: "Oh!" ready to kiss him as she might have kissed a weeping child. He repeated very softly: "Don't; it hurts too much." And, suddenly overwhelmed by his unhappiness, affected to tears by his tears, her nerves all upset, and her arms quivering. ready to open to him, she burst out sobbing.

When she found herself caught suddenly in his arms and kissed passionately upon her lips, she tried to cry out, to struggle, to push him away from her. But immediately she knew herself lost. While resisting she consented; while struggling against him she surrendered herself to him; while crying: "No, no, you must not!" she held him to her.

Afterwards she was overcome with grief, and hid her face in her hands. Then suddenly she got up, picked up her hat, which had fallen on the carpet, and fled, heedless of Olivier's prayers, as he clung to

her dress.

Once in the street, she wanted to sit down on the edge of the pavement. She felt crushed and as though her legs had been broken. A cab went by; she hailed it and said to the driver: "Go gently; drive wherever you like." She flung herself into the carriage, shut the door and huddled into the back of it, feeling alone behind the shut windows, alone to think.

For some minutes, she was conscious of nothing but the noise of the wheels and the shaking and jolting of the cab. She looked at the houses, at the people on foot and in cabs, at the omnibuses, with vacant eyes that saw nothing. Nor did she think of anything; it was as though she had been given time, granted a respite before daring to reflect upon what had happened.

Then, as she was spirited enough and no coward, she said to herself: "Well, I am a ruined woman." And for some minutes more, she remained under the spell of her emotions, in the certitude that the evil was unmendable, panic-stricken like a man who has

fallen from a roof and has not yet tried to move, suspecting that he has broken his legs and not wanting to make certain.

But instead of breaking down in face of the pain which she expected and whose coming she dreaded, her heart remained calm and peaceful after the catastrophe. It beat slowly and gently after this downfall that had overwhelmed her soul, and seemed to take no share in the panic of her mind.

She repeated aloud as though to hear it and convince herself of it: "I am a ruined woman." No echo or suffering in her body answered this complaint

of her conscience.

She let herself be rocked for a while by the motion of the cab, putting off for a moment the reflections she would have to make upon her cruel position. No; she felt no pain. She was afraid to think — that was all — afraid to know, or understand, or reflect, but on the other hand, in the obscure and impenetrable recesses of being created in us by the unceasing strife between our will and our desire, she seemed to feel a rare tranquillity.

After half an hour, perhaps, of this strange repose, she began at last to realise that despair would not answer her call, and, shaking herself from her torpor, she murmured: "It is queer, I scarcely feel any

regret."

Then she began to reproach herself. A feeling of anger rose up in her against her blindness and her weakness. How was it she had never foreseen it? Never understood that that moment of strife must come? That she liked the man enough to show herself a coward? And that the wind of desire can blow

STRONG AS DEATH

through the most upright heart and sweep away the will?

But after blaming herself harshly and expressing her contempt for herself, she was frightened and began to wonder what would happen.

Her first plan was to break with the painter and

never see him again.

She had scarcely taken this resolve before a thousand reasons rose up to fight against it. How could she explain this quarrel? What should she say to her husband? Would not the truth be suspected, and whispered, and then spread abroad?

Was it not better, in order to keep up appearances, to act before Olivier Bertin himself the hypocritical comedy of indifference and forgetfulness, and to show him that she had obliterated that moment from her

memory and her life?

But could she do it? Would she have the hardihood to appear to remember nothing, to assume a look of outraged surprise and say: "What do you want with me?" to the man whose swift fierce passion she had shared?

She thought about it for a long time and finally decided upon it: no other solution appeared feasible.

She would go boldly to see him the next day and make him understand immediately what she wanted, what she required of him. Not a word, not a hint, not a look must ever recall this shame to her mind.

After the first moment of distress — for he too would be distressed — doubtless he would take her view, like the loyal well-bred man he was; and he would remain for the future what he had been in the past.

As soon as she had formed this new resolve, she gave the driver her address and went home. She was seized with a great weariness, with a longing to go to bed, to see no one, to sleep and to forget. She locked herself in her room and remained till dinner stretched out on her sofa, stunned and desiring nothing but to shut her mind to these fatal thoughts.

She went downstairs punctually, astonished that she could be so calm and could wait for her husband with her usual expression. He appeared, carrying their daughter in his arms; and she shook his hand and kissed the child without experiencing any dis-

turbing emotion.

M. de Guilleroy asked her what she had been doing. She replied that she had been sitting as usual.

"Is the portrait good?" he asked. "It is coming on very nicely."

Whereupon he began to speak of his affairs; he liked to talk about them over his dinner — about the sitting of the House and the debate on the proposed

law with regard to the adulteration of goods.

This tittle-tattle, which as a rule she bore with well enough, got on her nerves, and made her examine with more attention than usual the vulgar man of phrases who took an interest in things of that sort. But she smiled as she listened to him, and answered pleasantly. She was even more gracious than usual; more patient of these banalities. She thought as she looked at him: "I have deceived him. He is my husband, and I have deceived him. Is it not strange? Nothing now can prevent it, nothing can wash it out! I have closed my eyes, and submitted for a few moments, just for a few moments, to a man's kiss; and

I am no longer a respectable woman. A few moments in my life, a few moments that cannot be undone, have brought upon me this little irreparable deed — so swift, so serious — a crime, and the most shameful of crimes for a woman, and I feel no despair. Yesterday if I had been told I should do it, I would never have believed it. If I had been assured of it, I would never have believed it. If I had been assured of it, I should have thought at once of the terrible pangs of remorse that inevitably tear me to-day. And I do not feel any at all, or scarcely any at all."

M. de Guilleroy went out after dinner as was his daily habit.

Then she took her little girl on her knees and kissed her, crying. Her tears were sincere, but they proceeded from her conscience, not from her heart.

But she could not sleep.

In the darkness of her room, she was tortured more than ever by the dangers that the painter's attitude could bring on her. And she began to be afraid of to-morrow's interview and of the things that would have to be said, face to face with him.

She got up early and stayed on her sofa all the morning, making herself try to foresee what she would have to fear, and what she would have to reply, and to prepare herself for every emergency.

She set out early, so that she could go on thinking

while she walked.

He scarcely expected her, and had been wondering ever since the day before what attitude he should take up towards her.

After her departure, after the flight that he had

not dared to resist, he had stayed by himself, listening, although she were already far away, to the sound of her steps, of her dress and of the slamming

door, pushed by a panic-stricken hand.

He remained standing, full of a deep, burning, surging joy. He had taken her, her! This thing had happened between them! Was it really possible? After his surprise at his victory had passed, he began to roll the thought on his tongue: and the better to realise it, he sat, almost lay, down on the couch

where he had possessed her.

He stayed there for a long time, conscious only that she was his mistress, and that the events of a few moments had flung between them, between the woman he had so greatly desired and himself, the mysterious bond that secretly unites two beings. In all his quivering frame he kept still the sharp memory of that swift second in which their lips had met, and their bodies had united and mingled one with the other, throbbing together with the mighty surge of creation.

He did not go out that evening. To feed upon the memory of it, he went to bed early, thrilling with

happiness.

The next morning, scarcely awakened, he asked himself: "What am I to do?" To a prostitute or an actress, he would have sent some flowers or a piece of jewellery. But in face of this unwonted situation he was tormented with doubt.

Certainly, he ought to write. . . . But what? He scribbled twenty letters, crossed them out, tore them up, and started again. All seemed to him wounding, offensive, foolish.

STRONG AS DEATH

He would have liked to express in delicate and charming language the thankfulness of his soul, his impulses of wild affection and his offers of endless devotion. But to say these passionate things, full of fine shades of meaning, he could only find ordinary conventional expressions: vulgar and childish phrases.

So he gave up the idea of writing, and decided to go and see her as soon as the time for the sitting had passed. For he was quite sure she would not come.

He shut himself up in his studio and went into raptures before the portrait, his lips itching to press themselves upon the painting that held something of her; and he kept looking through the window into the street every minute. Each dress seen in the distance made his heart throb. Twenty times he thought he recognised her. Then after the woman he had seen had passed by, he sat down a moment, overwhelmed as though he had been grossly deceived.

Suddenly he saw her, doubted it, grasped his glasses, recognised her, and, overcome by the violence of his emotions, sat down to wait for her.

When she came in, he fell upon his knees and wanted to take her hands, but she drew them back quickly; and since he remained at her feet, full of distress, his eyes upon her, she said to him haughtily:

"What are you doing? What is the meaning of

this attitude?"

He stammered:

"Oh, I beg you . . ."

She interrupted him harshly:

"Get up, you are absurd."

He got up, a little wildly, murmuring:

"What is the matter? Don't treat me so. I love you! . . ."

Then in a few quick dry words she told him what

she wanted and arranged the situation:

"I don't know what you mean. Don't ever speak to me of your love, or I will leave this studio and never come back again. If you forget, one single time, the condition of my presence here, you shall not see me again."

He looked at her, astounded by this unforeseen

harshness. Then he understood and murmured:

"I will obey you."

She replied:

"Good. I expected it of you! Now begin, for you

are a long time in finishing the portrait."

So he took up his palette and began to paint. But his hand trembled and his misty eyes looked without seeing. He wanted to cry, for the great pain of his heart.

He tried to talk to her, but she scarcely answered. When he tried to pay her a pretty compliment on her complexion, she stopped him in so crushing a tone that he was seized suddenly by one of those lovers' rages that change affection to hate. Soul and body received a great nervous shock; and abruptly, without any moment of transition, he loathed her. Yes: that was just like a woman. She, too, she was just like the others. Why not? She was false, changeable and weak like all of them. She had attracted him, seduced him by the artifices of a harlot, trying to stir his passions without giving anything in return, drawing him on just in order to refuse herself, using upon him all the tricks of a cowardly coquette, who

seems quite ready to undress, so long as the man whom she reduces to the state of the dogs in the

street is not panting with desire.

After all, so much the worse for her. He had taken her, possessed her. She could sponge her body and answer him insolently. She would efface nothing; and for his part he would forget her. Indeed, it would have been rare folly to hamper himself with a mistress like this, who would have eaten up his artist's livelihood with a pretty woman's capricious teeth.

He wanted to whistle, as he did in the presence of his models. But since he felt his nerves getting worse and was afraid of doing something foolish, he cut the sitting short, pretending to have an appointment. When they bowed to one another as they parted, they thought themselves really much further from each other than when they had met at the Duchesse de Mortemain's.

As soon as she had gone, he took his hat and overcoat and went out. A chilly sun in a blue sky, spread over by a film of mist, threw a pale, rather

sad and uncertain light over the town.

After he had walked some time with quick nervous strides, jostling the passers-by to avoid turning from his straight course, his violent anger against her crumbled away in regrets and a feeling of utter desolation. After he had repeated to himself all the grievances he had against her, he remembered, at the sight of other women passing by, how pretty and attractive she was. Like so many others who do not admit it, he had always hoped for an impossible meeting, for that rare, unique, poetic, passionate

affection, a dream that lingers in our hearts. Had he not almost found it? Was it not she who could have given him that almost impossible happiness? Then why is nothing ever realised? Why can we never grasp what we pursue? — or only manage to snatch some small part of it that makes yet more painful our pursuit of illusions?

He no longer bore a grudge against the young woman, but against life itself. Now that he thought it over, why should he bear a grudge against her? After all, with what could he reproach her? — with having been charming, kind and gracious to him, when she might herself have reproached him with

behaving like a villain?

He went home sorrowfully. He would have liked to beg her pardon, to devote himself to her service, to make her forget. And he tried to think what he could do to make her understand how obedient he would be till death to all her wishes.

The next day, she arrived with her daughter. Her smile was so wistful and her manner so sad that the painter seemed to see in those poor blue eyes, hitherto so full of gaiety, all the pain, all the remorse, all the desolation of her woman's heart. He was stirred to pity, and with a considerate reserve he showed her the most delicate attentions, in the effort to make her forget. She responded gently and kindly with the tired, crushed air of a woman in pain.

And as he looked at her, a mad idea of loving her and being loved took possession of him again; and he wondered why she was not more angry, and how she could still come again, listen to him and answer

him, with that memory between them.

The moment that she could see him again, hear his voice and bear to entertain in his presence that one thought which never left her, then that thought had ceased to be odious and insupportable to her. When a woman hates the man who has seduced her, she cannot find herself in his presence without her hatred flaming out. But she can never feel totally indifferent to the man. Either she must loathe him or she must pardon him. And when she can forgive that, then she is not far from loving.

While he was slowly painting, he reasoned things out in a series of precise, lucid, conclusive little arguments. He felt clear-headed, strong and master

of the situation.

He had only to be tactful, patient and loving, and he would win her back again one day or another.

He knew how to wait. To reassure her and reconquer her, he resorted to wiles of his own—to marks of affection cloaked under an apparent remorse, to hesitating attentions and an indifferent manner. In his quiet certitude of coming happiness, what matter whether it came a little sooner or later? He even experienced a strange and rare pleasure in not hurrying himself, watching her and saying to himself as he saw her come, always accompanied by her child: "She is afraid."

He felt that a slow process of reconciliation was going on between them; and that in the countess's glances appeared something strange, something constrained, something pitifully tender — the appeal of a struggling soul, of a fainting will that seems to say: "Oh! take me by force."

After a little while, she began to come alone, re-

assured by his reserve. Then he treated her as a friend, as a comrade, and spoke to her of his life, his

plans and his art as though to a brother.

Charmed by this unrestraint, she assumed gladly the rôle of adviser, flattered that he should thus mark her out from other women, and convinced that his genius would gain in delicacy from this intellectual intimacy. But by dint of consulting her and showing respect for her opinions, he made her pass quite naturally from the functions of adviser to the priestly office of inspirer. She delighted in thus extending her influence over the great man, and almost consented to his loving her as an artist, since she inspired his works.

It was one evening, after they had had a long talk about the mistresses of famous painters, that she let herself slide into his arms. She stayed there, this time, without attempting to run away, and returned his kisses.

She felt no remorse now, only a vague sense of having fallen away. And to answer the reproaches of her reason, she took refuge in a belief in fatality. Drawn to him by her heart, which had never been touched, and by the emptiness of her soul, her body conquered by the slow tyranny of caresses, gradually she became attached to him, after the manner of those affectionate women who love for the first time.

With him, it was a sharp spasm of sensual and romantic love. Sometimes it seemed to him that he had flown off one day with hand outstretched and had allowed to crush to his heart the wonderful winged dream that hovers always out of reach of

our hopes.

STRONG AS DEATH

He had finished the comtesse's portrait. It was the best he had painted; for he had contrived to see and fix that inexpressible something a painter scarcely ever reveals, the reflection, the mystery, the physiognomy of the soul that flits, intangible, across the mortal countenance.

Then months and years went by, scarcely loosening the tie that bound the Comtesse de Guilleroy to the painter Olivier Bertin. He no longer felt the exaltation of those first days, but a deep, calm affection, a sort of loving friendship which had become a habit with him.

She, on the other hand, felt her attachment to him growing — the passionate, obstinate attachment of certain women who give themselves to a man absolutely and for always. Loyal and honourable in their adultery as they might have been in marriage, they devote themselves to a solitary passion from which nothing will turn them aside. Not only do they love their lover, but they will to love him; and, their eyes fixed solely upon him, they so fill their hearts with thoughts of him that nothing extraneous can enter in. They have bound their lives together resolutely, as a swimmer who desires to die binds his hands together before leaping from a bridge into the water.

But from the moment that the comtesse had thus surrendered herself, she was a prey to fears for Olivier Bertin's fidelity. Nothing held him to her but his will (the will of a man), nothing but his caprice and his passing fancy for a woman met one day in the way he had already met so many others. She felt him to be so free, and so easy to tempt — this man

who lived like all men devoid of duties, scruples and fixed habits. He was handsome, famous and sought after. All the society ladies of easy virtue, all the women of the theatres and the street-corners, so prodigal with their favours to men like him, were ready for the satisfaction of his quickly roused desires. One of them might follow him after supper one evening, might please him and keep him.

So she lived in terror of losing him, watching anxiously his behaviour and his attitudes, overwhelmed by a word, horrified whenever he admired another woman, or praised a pretty face or a graceful figure. All that she did not know in his life made her tremble, and all that she knew terrified her. Each time they met she questioned him skilfully without his noticing it, drawing from him his opinions on the people he had seen, on the houses where he had dined, on the most changing thoughts of his mind. As soon as she thought she had discovered someone's possible influence, she fought against it with an amazing cleverness and with innumerable stratagems.

Many a time she foreboded those short intrigues that never go deep and last a week or a fortnight, and find their place from time to time in the life of every

artist in the public eve.

She had, so to speak, an intuition of approaching danger, even before the pleased look that appears in the eyes and face of a man excited by some amorous fancy, had warned her that some new desire was stirring in Olivier's mind.

Then her unhappiness began; and she knew only a sleep troubled by agonies of doubt. She would go and see him without warning, so as to surprise him;

would ask him seemingly artless questions, sound his heart and listen to his thoughts as one sounds and listens in order to discover a body's hidden ill.

And as soon as she was alone she would weep, convinced that they were going to take him from her this time, steal from her that love to which she clung so strongly because she had put into it, with all her will and the whole strength of her affection, all her hopes and all her dreams.

And when she found him coming back to her after these sudden desertions, she experienced, in retaking possession of him as of a thing lost and found again, a deep unspoken joy that sometimes as she passed a church drove her inside to render thanks to God.

The absorbing desire to please him always more than any other women and keep him against them all, had made her whole life an unrespited battle of coquetry. She had striven for him and before him unceasingly, with grace, beauty and elegance of form. She wished him to hear, whenever her name was mentioned, the praise of her charm, her taste, her wit and her dress. She wanted to please others because of him, and to attract them so that he might be proud and jealous of her. And every time that she thought him jealous, after having made him suffer a little, she would concede him a triumph that reawakened his love by exciting his vanity.

Then realising that a man could always meet in the world a woman of greater, because untried, physical attraction, she had recourse to other means, and

flattered and spoiled him.

Discreet and unwearying in her efforts, she showered praise over him, soothed him with admiration, and smothered him with compliments, so that everywhere else friendship and even affection might seem to him a little cold and incomplete, so that even if others loved him too, he might see at last that no one understood him as she did.

She made of her house and of those two reception rooms where he came so often, a place to which he was attracted as much by his artist's pride as by his man's heart: the one place in all Paris that he liked best to visit because all his desires were satisfied at once.

She not only learnt to discover all his likings so that she could give him, by ministering to them at her house, an impression of well-being that nothing could replace; she could even bring new ones to birth, she could create in him appetites of every kind, fleshly or spiritual, and the habit of receiving little attentions, affection, adoration, flattery. She strove to please his eyes with her charms, his sense of smell with perfumes, his ears with compliments and his palate with delicacies.

But when she had filled the soul and the body of this selfish and pampered bachelor with a host of tyrannical little desires, when she was quite confident that no other mistress would have such patience in watching over them and in tending them to bind him to herself by a hundred delicate enjoyments of life, she was suddenly afraid. When she saw him grow weary of his own house and complain unceasingly of his solitary existence; when she saw him, unable to come to see her except under all the restraints imposed by society, start to seek at the club — seek everywhere — for some means of relieving his loneliness, she was afraid he might think of marriage.

STRONG AS DEATH

Some days all these anxieties so distressed her that she longed for old age so that she might be done with all her pain and rest secure in a cool and calm affection.

The years passed, however, without dividing them. The chain that she had fastened about them was firm and she renewed the links as fast as they wore thin. But, anxious always, she watched over the painter's heart as one watches over a child crossing a street full of carriages. And every day still she dreaded the unknown event that hangs threatening over our heads.

The count, free from suspicion and jealousy, found nothing unusual in this intimacy between his wife and a famous artist who was received everywhere with great respect. The two men met so often that they had become used to one another and in the end

came to feel a great liking for one another.

N the Friday evening when Bertin arrived at his friend's house, where he was to dine in celebration of Annette de Guilleroy's return, he found no one in the little Louis XV drawing-room but M. de Musadieu, who had just got there.

He was an old intellectual who might have been, perhaps, a good soldier, and who could never console

himself for what he had not been.

He had been curator of the Imperial museums, and had contrived to get himself appointed Inspector of Fine Arts under the Republic; which did not prevent him from being, before all, the friend of Princes — of all the Princes, Princesses and Duchesses of the aristocracy of Europe — and the sworn protector of artists of every kind. Gifted with a keen and comprehensive intellect, a facility of language that permitted him to make the most ordinary remark sound pleading, a versatility of mind that put him at his ease in any society, and the subtle instinct of a diplomat that enabled him to judge men at first sight, he went round from drawing-room to drawing-room, day in and day out, displaying his brilliant but useless attainments as a conversationalist.

Apparently capable of doing anything, he talked on every subject with an engaging semblance of competence and a popular clarity of exposition, which made him much in demand among society

women, for whom he performed the functions of a perambulating encyclopaedia. He did indeed know a great many things without having read any but the indispensable books. But he was at his best with the five Academies, with the professors, the writers and the learned specialists to whom he lent a discerning ear. He could forget immediately all the too technical explanations or those which were of no use for his recitals, while retaining the rest very adequately. And he gave to the fragments of knowledge he gleaned in this way a form so simple, clear and natural that he made them as easy to understand as a scientific fairy-story. He gave the impression of being an emporium of ideas, one of those huge shops where one never finds anything rare, but where everything else is to be picked up cheap and in abundance, things of every origin and description, from household utensils to the ordinary instruments of kindergarten physics or of domestic surgery.

The painters, with whom his duties brought him into frequent contact, humbugged him and feared him. For his part, he did them certain services, got their pictures sold, put them into touch with the world at large and took a pleasure in introducing them, protecting them and setting them on their way. He seemed to devote himself to a mysterious work of creating fusion between society people and men of art, and was very proud of being intimate with the former while being on familiar terms with the latter, of lunching with the Prince of Wales as he passed through Paris, and dining the same evening with Paul Adelmans, Olivier Bertin and Amaury Maldant.

Bertin, who liked him well enough and found him

amusing, said of him: "He is Jules Verne's encyclo-

paedia, bound in ass's skin."

The two men shook hands and started to talk of the political situation and of the rumours of war, which Musadieu thought alarming, for various obvious reasons which he put forward very effectively: it being to Germany's best interest to crush France and to hasten the moment that Bismarck had waited for for eighteen years. On the other hand, Olivier Bertin produced irrefutable arguments to prove that these fears were chimerical: Germany not being so foolish as to compromise what she had won in what is always a hazardous venture, or the Chancellor so imprudent as to risk on a single stake and in the evening of his days his life's work and his glory.

M. de Musadieu, however, appeared to have some knowledge he did not wish to communicate. Moreover, he had seen a Minister during the day and yesterday evening he had met the Grand Duke

Wladimir, who had come back from Cannes.

The artist held out and with a gentle irony questioned the competence of the best-informed people. At the back of all these rumours lay preparations for activity on the Stock Exchange. Bismarck was, perhaps, the sole person who could have a definite opinion on the subject.

M. de Guilleroy came in, and shook hands warmly, excusing himself unctuously for having left them

alone.

"Well, now, you're a deputy, what do you think of these rumours of war?" the painter asked.

M. de Guilleroy started off on a long harangue. As a member of the House he knew more about it

than the others; nevertheless he was not of the same opinion as the majority of his colleagues. No: he did not think war probable in the near future unless it was provoked by French jingoism and the rodomontades of the self-styled patriots of the league. And he drew a portrait of Bismarck in bold outline after the manner of Saint-Simon. People would never take the trouble to understand the man, because we always attribute to others our own way of thinking and think them disposed to do what we should have done in their place. Bismarck was not a fickle, mendacious diplomat, but brutally frank, a man who always proclaimed the truth and gave due notice of his intentions. "I am desirous of peace," he said. It was true; he was desirous of peace and nothing but peace, and everything went to prove it with blinding clarity during the last eighteen years, everything down to his armaments, his alliances and his knot of peoples united against our impetuosity. M. de Guilleroy concluded on a tone of profound conviction: "He is a great man, a very great man who desires peace, but who believes solely in threats and violent means for its attainment. In fine, gentlemen, a great barbarian."

"Where there's a will there's a way," said M. de Musadieu. "I am quite ready to grant you that he loves peace if you will admit that he is always anxious to make war for its attainment. It is, moreover, a remarkable and indisputable fact that in this world one never goes to war except for the preservation of

peace."

A servant announced: "Madame la Duchesse de Mortemain."

Between the two leaves of the open door appeared a big, tall woman who came in with an air of authority.

Guilleroy dashed forward, kissed her fingers and

asked:

"How are you, Duchesse?"

The two other men greeted her with a certain respectful intimacy, for the Duchesse affected a rather

brusque cordiality.

She was the widow of General Duc de Mortemain, mother of an only daughter who was married to Prince de Salia, and daughter of the Marquis de Farandal. She came of a very ancient family and was royally wealthy. In her mansion in the Rue de Varenne she entertained all the celebrities in the world, who met and exchanged compliments at her house. Not a single Highness went through Paris without dining at her table, and no man could get himself talked about without her voicing an instant anxiety to know him. She had to see him, make him talk to her, and judge him. And that gave her much pleasure, brought some movement into her life, and fed the flame of haughty and benevolent curiosity that burned within her.

She had scarcely sat down when the same servant called out: "Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne de Corbelle."

They were both young — the Baron bald and

stout, his wife slender, elegant and very dark.

These two had a unique place in the French aristocracy, due entirely to their careful choice of acquaintance. They belonged to the petty nobility, were of no particular worth or ability, and were

inspired in all their actions by an exaggerated love of the refined, the correct and the distinguished. But by dint of frequenting only the most princely houses; of displaying their royalist leanings and the piety and supreme correctness of their sentiments; of respecting all that should be respected, and despising where contempt is due; by dint, in short, of never being mistaken on a point of social law or hesitating over a detail of etiquette, they had succeeded in passing in the eyes of many as the flower of the beau monde. Their opinion constituted a sort of code of good form and their presence at a house gave it the hall-mark of respectability.

The Corbelles were relations of the Comte de

Guilleroy.

"Well," said the Duchesse in tones of astonishment, "and your wife?"

"One moment, just one moment," pleaded the

comte. "It's a surprise. She is coming."

When Mme. Guilleroy, after being married a month, had made her entry into society, she was introduced to the Duchesse de Mortemain, who immediately took a liking to her, adopted her and

patronised her.

During twenty years this friendship had not been found wanting, and when the Duchesse said "my child," the emotion of that sudden and enduring infatuation could still be detected in her voice. It was at her house that the painter and the comtesse had met.

Musadieu came up to her and asked:

"Has your Grace seen the Intemperants' Exhibition?"

"No, what are they?"

"A new group of artists — impressionists in a state of inebriation. There are two that are very striking."

The great lady murmured contemptuously:

"The pleasantries of these gentlemen do not interest me."

Authoritative, brusque and hardly admitting any other opinion than her own, which she based solely on the consciousness of her social position, she considered, without exactly knowing why, artists and professors as intelligent hirelings destined by God for the amusement of or the service of society. She founded her judgments on nothing else than the degree of astonishment or unreasoned pleasure that was afforded her by the sight of a thing, by the reading of a book or the narration of a discovery.

Tall, big, heavy, with a ruddy complexion and a deep voice, she passed as possessing the grand manner because nothing put her out, and because she dared to say anything she pleased and took the whole world under her wing — patronising dethroned princes by receptions given in their honour, and even the Almighty Himself by her alms to the clergy and

her gifts to the churches.

Musadieu resumed:

"Is your Grace aware that they think they have caught Marie Lambourg's assassin?"

Her interest revived sharply and she replied:

"No, tell me about it."

And he recounted the details. Tall and very thin, with his white waistcoat and diamond shirt-studs, he used no gestures as he spoke, and had a correctness of manner that allowed him to say the daring things in

which he specialised. He was very short-sighted and despite his pince-nez never seemed to see anyone. And when he sat down he looked as though his whole frame had bent to the shape of the arm-chair. His chest doubled up and became quite small and almost disappeared as if his spinal cord were made of elastic. His legs, crossed one over the other, were like two interlaced ribbons; his long arms were propped up by the arms of his chair, and his pale hands, with their immensely long fingers, hung lax. His hair and moustache, dyed artistically, with patches of white cleverly forgotten here and there, were the butt of frequent jests.

While he was explaining to the Duchesse that the murdered prostitute's jewels had been given by her alleged assassin to another creature of loose morals, the drawing-room door again opened wide and two women came in in dresses of white lace. They were fair-haired, both covered in a froth of Mechlin, and bore the likeness to one another of two sisters of very different ages. The one was a little too mature, the other a little too young, the one a little too plump, the other a little too thin; and they came forward

all smiles, and drooping from the waist.

Everyone exclaimed and applauded. No one except Olivier Bertin knew that Annette de Guilleroy had returned, and they were charmed at the vision they presented together: the girl by the side of her mother, who from a little distance seemed almost as fresh and even more beautiful. For, too wide-open flower though she was, she had not ceased to be striking, whilst the girl had scarcely started to bloom

and was merely beginning to look pretty.

The Duchesse was delighted, and clapped her hands and exclaimed:

"Heavens! How charming, how delightful to see them side by side! See, M. de Musadieu, how like

one another they are!"

Everybody began to compare them; two factions were immediately formed. According to Musadieu, the Corbelles and the Comte de Guilleroy, the comtesse and her daughter were alike only in their complexion and their hair and above all in their eyes, which were exactly the same, being equally dotted with little black spots as though some tiny drops of ink had fallen on the blue iris. But in a little while, when the girl had become a woman, they would bear scarcely any resemblance to one another.

According to the Duchesse and Olivier Bertin, on the other hand, they were altogether alike and only their difference in years made them seem different.

The painter said:

"How she has changed during these last three years! I should not have recognised her. I shall never dare to speak to her any more like an old friend."

The comtesse laughed:

"The idea! I should like to see you standing on ceremony with Annette!"

The young girl, whose shyly roguish manner gave earnest of a future audacity, replied:

"It's more likely that I shall never dare to speak to M. Bertin as an old friend."

Her mother smiled:

"Keep the bad habit. I allow you. You will soon get into it again."

STRONG AS DEATH

But Annette shook her head:

"No, I should be embarrassed."

The Duchesse kissed her and began to examine her with a connoisseur's interest.

"Now, my child, look me straight in the face. Yes, you have just your mother's look. You won't do badly in a little time, when you've acquired a little sparkle. You must get fatter, not much fatter, just a little. You are quite a little scarecrow."

The comtesse burst out:

"Oh, no! Don't say that!"

"And why not?"

"It's so nice to be thin! Personally, I am going to make myself get thin."

Mme. de Mortemain got annoyed, forgetting in

her excitement the presence of a young girl.

"There you go again! You are always all for skin and bones, because it is easier to dress a thin woman than a woman with a little flesh on her bones. I belong to the generation of plump women! This is the generation of thin women. It makes me think of the Egyptian kine. I really cannot understand men when they affect to admire your bony frames. In my days, they asked for something better."

She stopped, and everyone smiled. Then she

went on:

"Look at your mother, child. She is just right: just as she should be. Imitate her."

They went into the dining-room. When they were

seated. Musadieu resumed the discussion:

"For my part, I think that men should be slender, because they are designed for exercises demanding agility and skill and incompatible with a corporation.

With women it is rather different. Don't you think

so, Corbelle?"

Corbelle did not know what to say, the Duchesse being stout, and his own wife more than slender! However, the Baronne came to her husband's rescue and pronounced decidedly for elegance. The year before, she had had to contend with an incipient stoutness, which she had checked very quickly.

"How did you do it?" asked Mme. de Guilleroy.

And the Baronne explained the method employed by all the elegant women of the day. You never drank at meals. But an hour after meals, you allowed yourself a cup of tea, very hot, boiling in fact. That was successful in every case. She quoted some remarkable instances of stout women who had become in three months thinner than a knife-blade. The Duchesse exclaimed with exasperation:

"Great heavens! How absurd to torture oneself like that! You can't appreciate anything — not anything, not even champagne. Now then, Bertin,

what do you think of it?"

"Really, your Grace, I am a painter! I drape the figure, and that is all I am concerned with. If I were a sculptor, I might have something to complain of."

"But you are a man. Which of the two do you

prefer?"

"I! Oh . . . a certain well-fed elegance; what my cook calls a nice little capon. It is not fat, but plump and dainty."

The comparison raised a laugh; but the comtesse, unconvinced, looked at her daughter and murmured:

"No. It is very nice to be thin. Women who keep thin do not get old."

The point was further discussed, and the company was divided. But they were all practically agreed upon one point: people who are too fat should not reduce too quickly. This reflection gave place to a review of well-known society women and to renewed arguments on their elegance, style and beauty. Musadieu thought the fair-haired Marquise de Lochrist incomparably charming, while Bertin considered there was no one to equal Mme. Mandelière — dark, with a low forehead, dark eyes and a rather large mouth in which her teeth seemed to sparkle.

He was sitting next to the young girl and suddenly

he turned to her:

"Listen, Nanette. All that we have just been saying, you will hear repeated at least once a week until you get old. In a week you will know by heart all that society thinks about politics, women, the theatre and everything else. You have only to alter the people's names occasionally, or the titles of the books. When you have heard us all expound and defend our opinions, you will placidly choose your own among those that one must hold, and then you will never have to think any more about anything. You will have nothing to do but rest."

The child did not answer but raised mischievous eyes to him, in which shone a young and active intelligence, held in leash now and eager to go free.

But the Duchesse and Musadieu, who played with ideas as one plays at ball, never realising that they returned the same ones again and again, protested in the name of human thought and activity.

Then Bertin took it upon himself to prove how entirely valueless, unsatisfying and aimless was the intelligence of society people, even the best-read of them; how ill-founded were their beliefs, how feeble and indifferent their interest in things of the mind,

and how fitful and uncertain their justice.

Seized by one of those crises of indignation, half sincere and half forced, called forth originally by a desire to be eloquent and then suddenly goaded by a sharpness of judgment that mere kindness of heart usually blunts, he told them that those people who are solely concerned with paying visits and dining in town find themselves, by an inevitable fatality, becoming pleasant and lively creatures enough, but conventional, and languidly moved by superficial cares, beliefs and desires.

He showed that there is nothing deep, or ardent, or sincere in them; that, their intellectual culture being negligible and their learning a mere gloss, they live, in fine, the lives of manikins performing the gestures and creating the illusion of being such superior people as they are not. He proved that since the feeble roots of their instincts have grown up amongst conventions and not amongst realities, they have no true likings; and that the very luxury of their existences is a tribute to their vanity and not the satisfaction of refined physical desires; for one gets poor food at their houses, and bad and expensive wines.

They live, he said, side by side with everything, without sight and without penetration; side by side with science, of which they know nothing; with nature, upon which they do not know how to look; with happiness, because they are incapable of enjoying anything ardently; with the beauty of the world

or of art, of which they speak without ever having discovered it or even believing in its existence, because they do not know the intoxicating delight of tasting the joys of life and of the intellect. They are unable to attach themselves to anything to the point of loving it whole-heartedly; of interesting themselves in anything to the point of being gladdened by the sharp joy of understanding.

Baron de Corbelle thought it incumbent upon him

to undertake the defence of pleasant society.

He did it with the help of inconsistent and irrefutable arguments, of those arguments which melt in the light of reason as snow does in the fire, arguments that elude the grasp, the absurd and triumphant arguments of a village priest demonstrating the existence of God. Finally, he compared society people to racehorses, which are indeed of no use, but are none the less the glory of the genus equinum.

Bertin, finding such an opponent impossible to tackle, maintained a contemptuous and polite silence. But suddenly the Baron's fatuity irritated him, and, skilfully interrupting his harangue, he described in its minutest detail the life of a man of fashion from the time he got up to the time he went to bed.

All the details, neatly grasped, described an outline of irresistible absurdity. There was our gentleman being dressed by his valet. First of all he expresses to the barber who comes to shave him a few generalities; then when the time comes for the morning outing, he asks the stable-boys after the horses' healths. Next he goes for a trot through the Bois with the sole object of giving and receiving salutations. Then comes lunch opposite his wife,

who has gone out with him in her carriage and whose sole conversation consists in an enumeration of the people seen in the morning. After that a progress, which lasts till evening, from drawing-room to drawing-room, where he whets his wits in the company of his peers; dinner with a prince, at which they discuss the European outlook; and so finally to the ball-room at the opera, where his timid pretensions to be a gay dog are innocently satisfied by what appears to be a wicked place.

The sketch was so true, and the irony so incapable of hurting anyone's feelings, that a laugh ran round

the table.

The Duchesse, shaken as fat people are with repressed merriment, had a few discreet little spasms in her chest. At last she said:

"No, really, it is too funny. You will make me die of laughter."

Bertin replied excitedly:

"Ah! In this world, your Grace, one never dies of laughing. It is very rarely that one laughs. Out of good form, we pretend to be amused and make a show of laughing. We imitate the grimace well enough, but never achieve the reality. Go into the popular theatres and you will see people laugh. Go and watch middle-class people amusing themselves, and you will see them laughing fit to choke themselves. Go into the soldiers' messes and you will see men gasping for breath, with their eyes full of tears, contorting themselves upon their beds at the sight of the antics of a buffoon. But in our drawing-rooms there is no laughter. I tell you we make pretence of everything, even of laughter."

Musadieu broke in:

"But pardon me, my dear fellow, you are a little severe. You yourself, I think, do not altogether despise this society which you ridicule so well."

Bertin smiled.
"I! Llike it."

"Well, in that case ——?"

"I am inclined to despise myself as a half-caste of doubtful origin."

"All that is mere pose," said the Duchesse.

And when he began to defend himself against the charge of posing, she terminated the discussion by declaring that artists always tried to make people take bladders for lanterns.

The conversation then became general, and touched on every subject — pleasant and conventional, friendly and discreet. Then as the dinner was nearly over, the comtesse suddenly pointed to the full glasses before her and cried:

"There, I have drunk nothing - not a drop. We

shall see if I get thin."

The Duchesse was furious and wanted to make her swallow a mouthful or two of mineral-water; but in vain, and she cried out:

"Oh, the idiot! Her daughter is going to turn her head. I beg you, Guilleroy, don't let your wife

carry out this absurd idea."

The comte, who was engaged in explaining to Musadieu the working of a thrashing-machine invented in America, had not heard.

"What absurd idea, Duchesse?"

"The absurd idea of wanting to get thin."
He threw a kindly, indifferent glance at his wife.

"I am not in the habit of opposing her wishes."

The comtesse got up and took her cousin's arm. The comte offered his to the Duchesse, and they passed into the big drawing-room, the boudoir at the back being kept for receiving in the day-time.

It was a very large, light room. The four walls were covered with beautiful wide strips of pale blue silk framed in white and gold; in the gleam of lamps and chandeliers they took on a soft light moony tint. Hung in the middle of the principal wall, the portrait of the comtesse by Olivier Bertin seemed to inhabit and give life to the room. It was at home there, and imparted to the very atmosphere of the drawing-room her youthful smile, her delightful expression and the delicate charm of her fair hair. And it was almost a custom, a sort of rite of etiquette, to compliment the model on the painter's work whenever one stopped before it, just as one makes the sign of the cross on going into a church.

Musadieu never failed. His opinion as a connoisseur commissioned by the state was, as it were, recognised by the law as expert; and he made it his duty to affirm, often and with conviction, the

superior quality of this painting.

"Really," he said, "that is quite the best modern portrait I know. It is so extraordinarily lifelike."

The Comte de Guilleroy, in whom the habit of hearing the picture eulogised had implanted the firm conviction that he possessed a masterpiece, came up to expatiate upon it. And for a minute or two, they heaped up all the usual technical formulas to do honour to the obvious and deliberate qualities of the picture.

Every eye, raised towards the wall, seemed rapt in admiration. And Olivier Bertin, who was accustomed to these flatteries, and paid scarcely any more attention to them than one does to the inquiries of someone met in the street after one's health, nevertheless rearranged the shaded lamp, that was placed before the picture to illumine it and that a servant had carelessly set awry.

Then they sat down; the comte approached the

Duchesse, who said to him:

"I believe my nephew is coming to fetch me and

to ask you to give him a cup of tea."

For some time their wishes had been tending in the same direction. They had each guessed it, though never had confided it to the other, even by a hint.

The Duchesse de Mortemain's brother, the Marquis de Farandal, after almost completely ruining himself by gambling, died from a fall from a horse, leaving a widow and a son. This young man was now twenty-eight years old and one of the most sought-after leaders of the cotillion in Europe. He was often invited to Vienna or London to put the finishing touch to the principal balls by dancing a few waltzes. Although almost devoid of means, his rank, family and almost royal connexions made him one of the most popular and envied men in Paris.

It was essential that he should confirm this youthful renown as a dancer and sportsman, and by a rich—a very rich—marriage, replace his social successes by political triumphs. As soon as he was elected a deputy, the Marquis would become, by that very fact, one of the props of the future throne,

one of the King's advisers, and one of the party leaders.

The Duchesse, who had made careful inquiry, was aware of the enormous wealth possessed by the Comte de Guilleroy, a prudent, thrifty man, who lived in an unpretentious flat, when he might have lived in one of the finest mansions in Paris. She knew all about his invariably fortunate speculations, his subtle financial instinct and his participation in the most profitable concerns floated during the last ten years. And she had conceived the idea of marrying her nephew to the daughter of the Norman deputy on whom this alliance would confer a preponderating influence in the aristocratic society of princely courts. Guilleroy, who had married money and increased by his skill a very fair fortune of his own, was now hatching other ambitions.

He believed in the restoration of the monarchy, and wanted to be in a position to take the most

complete advantage of that event.

As an ordinary deputy, he did not count for very much. As father-in-law of the Marquis de Farandal, whose ancestors had been the faithful familiars and favourites of the French royal house, he ascended to the front rank.

Besides this, the Duchesse's friendship for his wife lent this marriage an air of very dear intimacy. And lest some other young girl should come on the scene to whom the Marquis might take a sudden liking, he had brought his own daughter home in order to precipitate events.

Mme. de Mortemain had a very shrewd inkling of his plans and lent them her silent complicity. That very day, although she had not been told of the girl's return, she had engaged her nephew to come and call on the Guilleroys, in order to accustom him gradually to the habit of frequenting their house.

For the first time the comte and the Duchesse spoke in veiled terms of their wishes, and when they

parted a treaty of alliance was concluded.

They were laughing at the other end of the drawing-room. M. de Musadieu was narrating to the Baronne de Corbelle the presentation of a Negro embassy to the President of the Republic, when the

Marquis de Farandal was announced.

He appeared in the doorway and stopped short. With a rapid, habitual movement of his arm, he fixed a monocle in his right eye and left it there, as if to recognise the drawing-room into which he was making his way — and also perhaps to give the people there the time to see him, and remark his entry. Then with an imperceptible movement of cheek and brow, he let the piece of glass dangle at the end of a black silk cord, and advanced rapidly towards Mme. de Guilleroy, whose hand he kissed, bowing very low. He greeted his aunt in the same way, and then shook the others by the hand, going from one to the other with an easy grace.

He was a tall young man with reddish whiskers, already slightly bald, with the figure of an officer and the general appearance of an English sporting man. He gave one the impression, to look at him, of being one of those men whose every other part is better exercised than their head and who have a liking for only such things as develop their physical strength and activity. He was educated, however;

for he had learnt and was still learning every day, with intense mental concentration, all that it would be useful for him to know later: history, for whose dates he had a violent passion and whose lessons he was unable to appreciate; the elementary ideas of political economy necessary to a deputy; and the A B C of sociology drawn up for the use of the

ruling classes.

Musadieu had a good opinion of him and said: "He will be a man of worth." Bertin appreciated his skill and energy. They went to the same fencing-school, often hunted together, and used to meet on horseback in the paths in the Bois. So there had grown up between them a sympathy based upon common tastes — the instinctive freemasonry that is created between two men by a chance subject of conversation on which they both agree.

When the Marquis was introduced to Annette de Guilleroy, he had a sudden suspicion of his aunt's machinations, and, after bowing, he swept over her

a swift appraising glance.

He found her pretty and above all full of promise; for he had led so many cotillions that he was a connoisseur in young girls and could prophesy with certainty upon their future beauty, like an expert tasting an unseasoned wine.

He only exchanged a few triffing phrases with her, and then went and sat next to the Baronne de Cor-

belle, where he carried on low-toned gossip.

They departed early; and when everyone had left and the child had gone to bed, when the lamps had been put out and the servants had gone up to their rooms, the Comte de Guilleroy walked up and down

the drawing-room, lighted only by two candles, and kept the comtesse for a long time drowsing in an arm-chair as he developed his hopes, elaborated the attitude to be maintained, and thought out all the arrangements to be made, the things that might happen and the precautions to be taken.

It was late when he retired, pleased with his evening's work and murmuring: "I think it's a

settled thing."

"When are you coming, my dear? I have not seen you for three days, and it seems a long time. My daughter keeps me very busy, but you know that I can no longer do without you."

The painter, who was pencilling a few sketches, in his constant effort to find a fresh subject, read the comtesse's note over again, then opened the drawer of a bureau, and put it on a pile of other letters accumulated there since the beginning of their

relationship.

They were in the habit, thanks to the facilities afforded by the social round, of seeing one another every day. From time to time she would come to his house and let him go on working while she sat for an hour or two in the arm-chair in which she had once been posed. But since she was rather afraid of servants' gossip, she preferred to achieve these daily meetings — the small change of love — by receiving him at her house or meeting him in some drawing-room.

They used to make these arrangements a little beforehand; and everything always seemed quite

natural to M. de Guilleroy.

Twice a week at least the painter used to dine with a few friends at the comtesse's house. On Monday he paid his respects to her regularly in her box at the opera. Then they would arrange a meeting

in such-and-such a house, at which quite by chance they would arrive at the same time. He knew the evenings when she was at home; and then he would come in, and take a cup of tea with her. He felt himself at home near her dress, being so tenderly and so securely rooted in this ripened affection, so much in thrall to the habit of finding her somewhere, of passing a few moments at her side, exchanging a few words and sharing a few thoughts, that even though the fierce flame of his passion had long ago subsided. he felt a constant need of seeing her.

The desire for family life, for a house full of people and full of life, for meals taken in company, for evenings when a man can talk without weariness to people long known - that desire for contact, for rubbing shoulders with people, for intimacy, which sleeps in every human heart, and which every old bachelor carries with him from door to door round to every friend's house where he establishes a little of himself - gave the added strength of selfishness to his feelings of affection. In that house where he was loved and spoiled, and where he found all he wanted, he could still comfort and nurse his loneliness.

For three days he had not seen his friends, to whom their daughter's return had given much to do, and he was already wearying of himself. He was even a little annoyed that they had not invited him sooner, and careful not to trouble them first. The comtesse's letter woke him up like the crack of a whip. It was three o'clock in the afternoon; and he decided to go to her house immediately, so that he would catch her before she went out.

His man appeared, summoned by a ring at the bell.

"What sort of a day is it, Joseph?"

"Very fine, sir."

"Warm?"
"Yes, sir."

"My white waistcoat, blue coat and grey hat."

He was always very elegantly dressed. But even though he was fitted out by a tailor in the most correct style, the mere way in which he wore his clothes and in which he walked — with his stomach girt in a white waistcoat and his tall grey felt tilted slightly backwards — seemed to disclose at once the fact that he was an artist and a bachelor.

When he got to the comtesse's house, he was told that she was getting ready to go for a drive in the Bois. He was annoyed, and waited for her.

As was his custom, he began to walk across the drawing-room, going from one chair to another or from window to wall in the large room shadowed by its curtains. On the slender tables with gilded legs various trinkets of all descriptions, pretty, useless and expensive, lay in a studied disorder. There were little old boxes of worked gold, snuff-boxes adorned with miniatures, ivory statuettes and finally a few quite modern objects in dull silver, of a quaint severity, betraying English taste. There was a tiny kitchen-stove and on top of it a cat drinking out of a saucepan; a cigarette-box resembling a large loaf. a coffee-pot for holding matches, and finally in a jewel-box a complete set of dolls' jewellery - necklaces, bracelets, rings and brooches, ear-rings set in brilliants and sapphires and rubies and emeralds — a tiny, fantastic toy that looked as though it had been made by the jewellers of Lilliput.

Every now and then he touched an object given by himself on some anniversary, took it up, handled it and examined it with a dreamy indifference, and

then put it back in its place.

In a corner a few books, rarely opened and luxuriously bound, lay ready to the hand on a round single-legged table, in front of a small, circular couch. On this table too was the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, rather crumpled and tired, with its pages all dogeared as if it had been read; then various other publications with the leaves uncut; *Arts Modernes*, which people must take in solely on account of its price (the subscription being four hundred francs a year); and the *Feuille Libre*, a thin pamphlet in a blue cover, where the newest poets, called the Enervates, spread themselves in print.

Between the windows stood the comtesse's bureau, a gay piece of furniture of the last century, on which she wrote answers to important notes brought in during a reception. And there were a few other works on this bureau, well-known books — an indication of the woman's mind and heart: Musset, Manon Lescaut, Werther; and to show that she was not a stranger to complicated emotions and to the mysteries of psychology, Les Fleurs du Mal, Rouge et Noir, La Femme au XVIII Siècle, and Adolphe.

Beside these volumes was a delightful mirror, a masterpiece of the goldsmith's art, whose glass lay face downwards on a square of embroidered velvet, so that one could admire the curious gold and silver

Bertin took it up and looked at himself in it. In the last few years he had got terribly old, and although he thought his face more striking than before, he began to feel saddened by his heavy cheeks and wrinkled skin.

A door opened behind him.

"Good afternoon, M. Bertin," said Annette.
"Good afternoon, my child. How are you?"

"Very well; and you, M. Bertin?"

"What! You won't give me my pet name!"

"No, really, it embarrasses me."

"Come now."

"Yes, it embarrasses me. You frighten me."

"Why?"

"Because — because you are neither young enough nor old enough!"

The painter laughed:

"In the face of that reason, I don't insist."

She suddenly blushed, up to the white skin where the hair begins to grow, and went on in confusion:

"Mummy told me to tell you that she was coming down immediately, and to ask you if you would come to the Bois de Boulogne with us."

"Yes, certainly. Are you alone?"

"No; with the Duchesse de Mortemain."

"Very well, I will come with you."

"Then, do you mind if I go and put on my hat?" "Go, my child."

As she left the room, the comtesse entered, veiled and ready to set out. She stretched out her hands.

"We never see anything of you nowadays, Olivier. What are you doing with yourself?"

"I did not want to bother you at this time."

She put all her reproaches and all her love into the way in which she said: "Olivier!"

"You are the best woman in the world," he said,

touched by the intonation of his name.

This little lovers' quarrel over and settled, she went

on in the ordinary tone of social intercourse:

"We are going to pick up the Duchesse at her house and then go for a drive in the Bois. We shall have to show all these things to Nanette."

The carriage was waiting at the court-yard gate.

Bertin sat opposite the two women; and the carriage started off amid the noise of horses pawing

the ground under the echoing archway.

Along the wide boulevard leading to the Madeleine, all the joyousness of the new-born spring seemed to have fallen from heaven on everything that lived.

The mild air and the sun gave the men a holiday air and the women a languishing charm; set the little ragamuffins gambolling, and the white-clad scullions too, who had put down their baskets to run and play with their brothers, the young guttersnipes; the dogs seemed in a hurry, and the concierges' canaries sang their hearts out; only the old nags harnessed to the cabs still went on with their dejected, funereal trot.

The comtesse murmured:

"Oh, what a lovely day! It makes one glad to be alive!"

In the brilliant light the painter looked at them one after the other, mother and daughter. Yes, they were different, but at the same time so alike that the one was indeed the offshoot of the other — made of

the same flesh and blood and animated by the same life. Their eyes especially — those blue eyes splashed with little black drops, a very fresh blue in the girl's, a little faded in the mother's - looked at him with such identity of expression, when he spoke to them, that he expected to hear them make the same reply. And he was a little surprised to discover, as he made them laugh and chatter, that he had in front of him two quite different women — one who had lived and one who had yet to live. No: he could not foresee what would become of this child when her vouthful intelligence, influenced by tastes and instincts as yet unawakened, should have expanded in the whirl of the world. She was a pretty little person, fresh, ready for the gamble of life and for love, unknown and unknowing, setting forth from the harbour like a ship, just as her mother was returning from her vovage through life and love.

He was touched by the thought that it was he that she had chosen and even yet put above all others — this still pretty woman, swaying in her

carriage, in the warm spring air.

He threw at her a glance full of gratitude; she understood; and he seemed to feel her thanks in a rustling of her dress.

In his turn, he murmured: "Yes, what a beautiful day!"

When they had picked up the Duchesse in the Rue de Varenne, they drove towards the Invalides, crossed the Seine and reached the Champs Elysées, going towards the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, surrounded by a flood of carriages.

The young girl sat next to Olivier with her back

to the horses and opened eager innocent eyes upon the crowd of vehicles. From time to time, when the Duchesse and her mother acknowledged a salutation with a slight motion of the head, she asked: "Who's that?" He answered: "The Pontaiglins," or "The Puicelois," or "The Comtesse Lochrist," or "The beautiful Mme, Mandelière."

They were now going along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, amid the noise of swiftly moving wheels. The carriages, rather less congested than before they reached the Arc de Triomphe, seemed to be contending in an interminable race. Cabs and heavy landaus and pompous phaetons passed one another in turn, to be suddenly outdistanced by a swift victoria drawn by a single horse, which bore through all this rolling mob of bourgeois and aristocrats, through all societies, all classes and hierarchies, a young indolent woman whose thin and daring costume flung over the carriages she grazed the strange perfume of an unknown flower.

"Who is that lady there?" asked Annette.
"I don't know," answered Bertin, while the

Duchesse and the comtesse exchanged a smile.

The leaves were budding and the nightingales that haunt this garden of Paris were already beginning to sing in the young greenery; and when they broke into a walk on approaching the lake, it was an incessant exchange of bows and smiles and friendly words from carriage to carriage as the wheels touched one another. It looked now like a fleet of small boats in which sat very serious ladies and gentlemen. The Duchesse, whose head was continually bowed in response to raised hats or inclined brows, seemed to

be holding a review and recollecting all that she knew, thought or suspected of the people who filed before her.

"Look, child, there's the beautiful Mme. Mande-

lière, the beauty of the Republic."

In a light gay-looking carriage, the beauty of the Republic, apparently indifferent to her undisputed glory, was displaying for admiration her big dark eyes, her low forehead helmeted with black tresses and her willing, rather large mouth.

"Very beautiful all the same," said Bertin.

The comtesse did not like hearing other women praised. She shrugged her shoulders slightly without answering.

But the young girl, suddenly stirred to an instinc-

tive rivalry, had the courage to say:

"No, I don't think so."
The painter turned to her.

"What! You don't think her beautiful?"

"No, she looked as though she had been dipped in ink."

The Duchesse laughed, delighted.

"Bravo, my child. For six years half the men in Paris have been languishing before this Negress. I am afraid they don't care for what we say. Ah! Look at the Comtesse de Lochrist."

Alone with her white poodle in a landau sat the comtesse, delicate as a miniature, fair-haired and brown-eyed, with slender limbs that for five or six years had called forth the undiminished raptures of her admirers; she bowed, a fixed smile upon her lips.

But still Nanette displayed no enthusiasm.

"Oh," she said, "her complexion is not very fresh now."

Bertin, who rarely upheld the comtesse's claims in these daily recurring discussions over the two rivals, became suddenly exasperated at the little wretch's intolerance:

"Dammit," he said, "however much or little one likes her, she's very charming, and I hope you may

grow as pretty as she is."

"No," said the Duchesse, "you only notice women when they are over thirty. The child is quite right: you only praise them when they have lost their freshness."

"Forgive me," he exclaimed, "but a woman is not really beautiful until late, when her full expression

has developed."

And expanding this theme, that the first freshness is only the gloss of ripening beauty, he proved that men of the world are not mistaken in paying little attention to young women in all their glorious bloom; and that they do well not to pronounce them beautiful until the final stage of their flowering.

Flattered, the comtesse murmured:

"There is truth in what he says. He judges as an artist. A young face is pretty but always a little

insipid."

And the painter developed his point, and determined the moment at which a face, gradually losing the indefinite charm of youth, takes on its defined form, its character and physiognomy.

And at each word the comtesse assented with a little decided nod of the head. And the more he insisted, with the warmth of a barrister pleading a

case or the energy of a prisoner defending his cause, the more she approved him with look and gesture, as if they had formed an alliance to combat some peril or defend themselves against a false and dangerous belief. Annette scarcely listened to them, being entirely taken up with watching. Her constantly smiling face had become serious, and she said nothing, dazed with happiness in the midst of this stir of life. This sun, these leaves, these carriages and this beautiful life of wealth and gaiety - all this was for her.

She would be able to come like this every day; she too would be known, saluted and envied. And men, perhaps, would point her out and say how beautiful she was. She singled out the men and women who struck her as the most elegant, and always asked their names, her mind absorbed in the sound of the linked syllables, that woke in her mind an occasional echo of admiration and respect if they were names she had often met in the newspapers or in history. She could not get used to this procession of celebrities, and could not even quite believe in their reality, as though she had been watching some pageant. The cabs inspired her with a contempt mingled with disgust, annoyed and irritated her, and she said suddenly:

"I think they ought to allow only private carriages to come here."

Bertin answered:

"And what then becomes of liberty, equality and fraternity, young lady?"

She pouted as though to say: "I will leave them

to others," and replied:

"There might be a Bois for the cabs — the Bois de

Vincennes, for instance."

"You are out of date, my child, and don't realise that we are swimming in mid-democracy. Otherwise, if you want to see the Bois free of all democratic taint, come in the morning, and you will only find the cream, the very cream, of society."

And he gave her a picture - one of those that he could paint so well - of the Bois in the morning, with its cavaliers and its amazons; of that most select club where everyone knows everyone else by their names, Christian names, connexions, titles, qualities and vices, as if they all lived in the same district and the same small town.

"Do you often come here?" she asked.

"Very often. It is really the most delightful part of Paris."

"You go riding in the morning?"

"And then in the afternoon you pay calls?"

"Yes."

"Then when do you work?"

"Oh, I work . . . sometimes, and besides, I have chosen a special time-table that allows my tastes free play. Since I paint beautiful women, I must of course see them, and I follow them about a little everywhere."

Still quite serious, she murmured: "On foot as well as on horseback?"

He gave her a sidelong glance of satisfaction, as though to say: "Come, come! And already! Oh! you will be all right!"

A cold gust of wind blew past, coming from far

away in the open country that as yet was scarcely wakened to the spring; and the whole Bois, the gay,

chilly, fashionable Bois, shuddered.

For a few moments this breeze set slender leaves quivering on the trees and dresses quivering on shoulders. With an almost identical gesture the women drew about their arms and throats the wraps fallen behind them; and from one end of the path to the other the horses started to trot as if the sharp breeze that was blowing up had whipped them as it touched them.

They were swept again through a silvery noise of tossing bridle-chains, bathed in the ruddy slanting rays of the setting sun.

"Are you going home?" the comtesse asked the

painter, all of whose habits she knew.

"No, I am going to the club."

"Then we will drop you there as we pass."

"Thank you; that will be very nice."

"And when are you going to ask the Duchesse and myself to lunch?"

"Choose your day!"

The painter — official artist to society women — whom his admirers had baptised "the realist Watteau" and his detractors called "the dress and mantle photographer," often received to lunch and dinner the beautiful ladies whose features he had reproduced; and others too, all the women who were celebrated or well known, and who were delighted by these little entertainments in a bachelor establishment.

"The day after to-morrow. Will that suit you, my dear Duchesse?" asked Mme. de Guilleroy.

"Certainly; it is very charming of you. M. Bertin never thinks of me when he gives those parties of his. It is obvious that I am getting old."

The comtesse, accustomed to consider the artist's

house rather as her own, went on:

"Only the four of us in the landau, the Duchesse, Annette, myself, and you? What does the great artist think?"

"Only the four of us," he said as he got out; "and I will have some lobsters à l'alsacienne for you."

"Oh! you'll make a gourmet of the child."

He bowed, standing by the carriage door. Then he went briskly into the porch of the main entrance of the club, flung his overcoat and stick at the crowd of footmen who got up like soldiers when an officer passes, and ascended the wide staircase. He passed another squad of servants in breeches, pushed open a door and suddenly felt as active as a young man, hearing at the end of a corridor the continual sound of clashing foils, lunging feet, and exclamations uttered in lusty voices: Touché. — A moi. — Passé. — J'en ai. — Touché. — A vous.

In the fencing-room, the fencers, dressed in grey, wearing leather jerseys, trousers gathered in at the ankle, and a sort of apron that fell over the stomach, one arm and curved hand in the air, the other hand, enormous in its gauntlet, holding the slender, supple foil, lunged and drew back with the angular agility of muscular dolls.

Some were resting and chatting, still out of breath, red and perspiring, handkerchief in hand mopping foreheads and necks; while others, seated on the square divan running all round the hall, watched

the contests, Liverdy versus Landa, and Taillade, the club professional, versus the huge Rocdiane.

Bertin, smiling and feeling quite at home, shook

hands.

"I challenge you," shouted the Baron de Baverie to him.

"At your service, my dear fellow."

And he passed into the dressing-room to change.

It was long since he had felt himself so active and vigorous, and, suspecting that he was going to put up an excellent fight, he hastened his movements with the impatience of a schoolboy going out to play. As soon as he found himself facing his opponent, he attacked him with extraordinary vigour, and in ten minutes, after he had touched him eleven times, he made him so thoroughly tired that the Baron begged for mercy. Then he crossed swords with Punisimont and with his colleague, Amaury Maldant.

The cold shower afterwards, chilling his panting body, recalled the baths of his twentieth year, when he took headers in mid-autumn from the bridges in

the suburbs to astonish the populace.

"Are you dining here?" asked Maldant.

"Yes."

"We have got a table with Liverdy, Rocdiane and Landa. Be quick; it's quarter past seven!"

There was a buzz of voices in the dining-room filled

with men.

Here were all the night-birds of Paris, employed and unemployed, all the men who after seven in the evening don't know what to do with themselves and dine at the club in the hope of attaching themselves, by a chance meeting, to something or somebody.

When the five friends were seated, Liverdy, the banker, a vigorous thickset man of forty, said to Bertin:

"You were quite inspired this evening."

The painter replied:

"Yes, I did some amazing things."

The others smiled, and Amaury Maldant, the landscape-painter, a thin, bald little man with a grey beard, observed thinly:

"Yes, I always have a return of sap in April too. It makes me put forth a few leaves, half a dozen at most. Then it all goes off in mere emotion. There

are never any fruits."

The Marquis de Rocdiane and the Comte de Landa sympathised with him. Both of them were older than he, though not even a practised eye could be sure of their age; clubmen, riders and fencers whom continual exercise had given frames of steel, they prided themselves on being younger, when all was said, than the backboneless blackguards of the new

generation.

Rocdiane came of a good family and was a constant visitor in every drawing-room, but was suspected of every kind of moral laxity in money matters; which, said Bertin, was not surprising, seeing that he had spent so much of his time in those hotbeds of intrigue. He was married, and lived apart from his wife, who paid him an allowance; and was a director of Belgian and Portuguese banks. In his strenuous quixotic bearing he flaunted the somewhat tarnished honour of a gentleman of fortune — an honour burnished from time to time by the blood from a scratch received in a duel.

The Comte de Landa was a good-natured giant, very proud of his figure and broad shoulders. Although he was married and the father of two children, he could only with difficulty bring himself to dine at home three times a week. Other days he stayed at the club with his friends after the fencing was over.

"The club," he said, "is a family, the family of those who no longer have one, of those who are never likely to have one, and of those who are bored in

their own."

The conversation, which started on the subject of women, flowed from anecdote to recollection and from recollection to boastings and indiscreet confidences.

The Marquis de Rocdiane gave away his mistresses by supplying quite unmistakable clues. They were society women whose names he did not mention, so that they could be the more easily guessed. Liverdy, the banker, described his by their Christian names. He told them a story: "At that time I was on the best of terms with the wife of a diplomat. Now one evening, as I went away, I said to her: 'My darling Marguerite' . . . " He stopped, seeing everyone smile, then went on: "Damn! I have let something out. One ought to get into the habit of calling all women Sophie."

Olivier Bertin maintained a strict reserve and used

to declare, when people asked him:

"I! Oh! I content myself with my models."

They pretended to believe him. And Landa, who contented himself with the ladies of the town, used to get very excited at the thought of all the pretty little bits who walk the streets, and of all the young

things who undressed in front of the painter, at ten francs an hour.

As the bottles were emptied, all these old fogies, as the younger members of the club called them, all these old fogies with flushed faces, became very lively under the impulse of reawakened desire and freshly fanned passions.

After the coffee Rocdiane plunged into the most veracious indiscretions, and forgot the ladies of society to sing the praises of ordinary prostitutes.

"Paris," he said, a glass of kümmel in his hand, "is the only town where a man doesn't get old, the only one where at fifty (provided he is strong and well preserved) he will always find a little thing of eighteen, pretty as an angel, to love him."

Landa, recognising the Rocdiane of the liqueur stage, approved enthusiastically and enumerated all the little girls who still fell in love with him daily.

Liverdy, however, more of a sceptic and pretending to an exact knowledge of women's worth, murmured:

"Oh, yes; they tell you they are in love with you." Landa retorted:

"They prove it to me, my dear fellow." "Those proofs don't count for anything."

"They are good enough for me."

Rocdiane cried out:

"But they think they do, I swear! Do you think that a pretty little bitch of twenty who has already been leading the gay life for five or six years, in Paris, where our moustaches have educated and spoiled her taste for kisses, can any longer distinguish between a man of thirty and a man of sixty? Not a bit of it!

Rubbish! She has seen too much and learnt too much. Mark you! I bet you that at bottom she likes an old banker better, really and truly better, than any young man about town. Does she know it? Does she think about it? Have men got any age in this place? Ah, my dear fellow, we get younger with our white hairs, and the whiter we get, the more they say they love us, the more they show it and the more they mean what they say."

They got up from the table fuddled and sharp-set with alcohol, ready to set off for any conquest; and they began to discuss how they should spend their evening. Bertin mentioned the Circus, Rocdiane the Hippodrome, Malvant the Eden, and Landa the Folies Bergère. But suddenly a slight, far-off sound

of violins being tuned reached their ears.

"So there's some music at the club to-day," said Rocdiane.

"Yes," answered Bertin; "shall we go there for ten minutes before going out?"

"Right."

They passed through a lounge, a billiard-room and a card-room, and finally arrived in a sort of box commanding the musicians' gallery. Four gentlemen ensconced in arm-chairs were already waiting with a meditative expression, whilst down below in the midst of the rows of empty seats some ten others were chatting, seated or standing up.

The conductor knocked on his desk with little taps

of his bow; and they began.

Olivier Bertin had the sort of passion for music that people have for opium, it made him dream.

As soon as the wave of sound proceeding from the

instruments had reached him, he felt swept away by a sort of nervous intoxication that set body and brain wildly throbbing. His imagination ran wild among tender thoughts and pleasant dreamings, drunk with melody. Eyes closed, legs crossed and arms relaxed, he listened to the sound and watched things that

passed before his eyes and through his mind.

The orchestra was playing one of Haydn's symphonies, and the painter had only to lower his eyelids over his eyes to see again the Bois, the crowd of carriages around him, and in front, in the landau, the comtesse and her daughter. He listened to their voices, followed their words, felt the movement of the carriage and breathed the air laden with the fragrance of leaves.

Three times his neighbour spoke to him and interrupted his vision, which three times came again, as after a sea-passage the rolling of the boat begins once more in the tranquil stillness of our beds.

Then it expanded, lengthened out into a distant journey with the two women always seated in front of him, now in a railway-carriage, now at the table of a foreign hotel. Throughout the playing of the whole piece they accompanied him thus, as if, during this drive in the brilliant sunshine, they had left the image of their two faces imprinted at the back of his eye.

A silence; then the noise of voices and moving chairs drove away this mist of dreams; and he saw his four friends drowsing around him in the engagingly simple postures of attentive listening that has

slipped imperceptibly into slumber.

He woke them up.

"Well, what are we going to do now?" he asked. "For myself," replied Rocdiane frankly, "I should like to go on sleeping here a little."

"I too," said Landa.

Bertin got up.

"Oh, well, I shall go home, I am rather tired."

He felt, on the contrary, extremely energetic; but he was anxious to get away: he wanted to avoid the sort of evening's entertainment he knew so well, that ended round the club baccara table.

So he went home, and the next morning, after a night of nerves — one of those nights that put artists into the state of cerebral activity called inspiration — he decided not to go out and to work until evening.

He did an excellent day's work. It was one of those days when work is easy, when the inspiration in the mind seems to flow down into the hands and

arrive spontaneously on the canvas.

With doors closed, cut off from the world, in the quietude of a house shut against all comers, in the beloved peace of the studio, his eye clear, and his mind lucid, eager and alert, he tasted of that happiness which only artists know, of bringing forth their work in joy. Nothing existed for him, during these hours of work, but the piece of canvas where a picture was being born under the caressing touch of his brush. And in these moments of passionate felicity, he felt a strange and pleasing sense of abundant life intoxicating him, flooding his whole body. In the evening he was exhausted, with the exhaustion that follows healthy exertion; and he went to bed filled with pleasant anticipations of his lunch the next day.

The table was covered with flowers and the menu

most carefully chosen for the benefit of Mme. de Guilleroy, who had a delicate but pronounced liking for food; and in spite of an energetic though short resistance, the painter prevailed upon his guests to drink champagne.

"The child will be tipsy," said the comtesse.

The Duchesse answered indulgently: "Oh, but one should be — once."

When they returned to the studio they were all a little infected with the sort of joyous gaiety that fills people with a sense of lightness and sets wings on their feet.

The Duchesse and the comtesse had a meeting of the committee of the French Mothers, and were going to take the young girl home before going on to the society. But Bertin offered to take her for a walk with him and bring her back to the Boulevard Malesherbes. And so they went out together.

"Let us go the longer way round," she said.

"Would you like to take a stroll in Monceau Park? It is a pleasant place; and we can watch the little children with their nurses."

"Yes, I should like to so much."

Going by way of the Avenue Velasquez, they passed through the monumental gilded gate which serves as signboard and entrance to the fashionable precious little park displaying its green and artificial elegance in the heart of Paris, surrounded by a ring of princely mansions.

All along the wide paths stretching in a sophisticated curve between the flower-beds and grassy plots, a crowd of men and women sits on iron chairs watching the passers-by; and in the little alleys buried

deep in the shade and winding like streams, groups of children grovel in the sand, run about or skip beneath the indolent eye of their nurses or the anxious regard of their mothers. The huge domelike trees, veritable monuments of leaves — mighty chestnuts whose heavy green is splashed with clusters of red or white, elegant sycamores, ornamental plantains with their studiedly twisted trunks — decorate the wide rolling lawns with pleasant prospects.

It is warm, the turtle-doves are cooing among the trees and paying visits from tree-top to tree-top, while the sparrows bathe in the rainbow that gleams where the sun falls across the fine spray sprinkled over the tender, newly watered grass. The white statues on their pedestals seem happy in this green freshness. A young boy in marble draws from his foot an undiscoverable thorn, as though he had pricked himself a moment ago, as he ran after the Diana fleeing yonder towards the little lake imprisoned among the arbours that shelter a ruined temple.

Other statues, coldly amorous, embrace beside the flower-beds, or dream, hand on knee. A cascade rolls foaming over pretty rocks. A tree, lopped column-wise, wears a wreath of ivy; a tomb bears an inscription. The stone pillars reared up on the lawns no more recall the Acropolis than this elegant

small park recalls a wild forest.

It is the delightful and artificial place where the townsfolk go to look at flowers grown in greenhouses, and to admire, as at the theatre they admire the pageant of life, the charming spectacle offered by beautiful nature set in the very midst of Paris.

Olivier Bertin had been for years in the habit of

coming almost every day into this select place, to see the women of Paris move in their true setting. "It is a park made for elegant toilets," he said; "badly dressed people are an outrage there." And he would wander there for hours, and got to know all the plants and all the people who came there regularly.

He walked along the paths by Annette's side, his gaze distracted by the stirring, variegated life of the

garden.

"Oh! what a little darling!" she cried.

She was looking at a little boy with fair curly hair, who was staring at her with a look of wondering enchantment in his blue eyes.

Then she looked at all the children in turn, and the pleasure the sight of these animated beribboned dolls afforded her made her talkative and confidential.

She walked along with little steps, treating Bertin to her remarks and reflections on the children and their nurses and their mothers. The sturdy children called forth exclamations of delight and the pale ones

filled her with pity.

He listened to her, amused rather by her than by the babies; and, always conscious of his art, he murmured: "Delightful!" thinking that he ought to be able to make an exquisite picture with a corner of the park and a bunch of nurses, mothers and children. How had he never thought of it before?

"Are you fond of these young rascals?"

"Oh! I adore them."

As he watched her looking at them, he felt that she would like to take them up, and kiss them and fondle them — the tender sensuous longing of a future mother. And he was amazed at this secret

instinct, buried deep in this feminine body.

As she was in a communicative mood, he asked her about her tastes. She admitted with a charming simplicity to hopes of success and social fame; she wanted beautiful horses, of which she knew almost as much as a dealer, for the Roncières estate was taken up partly with their breeding; and she troubled about a fiancé scarcely any more than one would about finding chambers, when there are always a host of flats to let.

They drew near the lake on which two swans and six ducks floated gently, as clean and unruffled as birds made of china. They passed a young woman sitting on a chair with an open book on her knees and her eyes looking straight in front of her, her

spirit lost in reverie.

She moved no more than a wax figure. Plain, low-born and dressed with a modesty innocent of desire to attract — a governess perhaps — she had left for the Land of Dreams, carried away by a phrase or a word that had bewitched her heart. Doubtless she was living through the adventure begun in the book, fitting it to the measure of her own longings.

Bertin stopped short in surprise.

"It's good," he said, "to get right away, like that." They had passed in front of her. They turned and

came back again but she never saw them; her whole attention was absorbed in the distant flight of her imagination.

The painter said to Annette:

"Tell me, my child, would it bore you to sit for me, once or twice?"

"Not at all; I should love to."

"Take a good look at that girl, journeying in the world of the Ideal."

"There, on that chair?"

"Yes. Well, you will sit just like that on a chair, you will have an open book on your knees, and you will try to do as she is doing. Have you ever dreamed when you were wide awake?"

"Oh, yes!"

"What about?"

And he tried to make her talk about her journeys in fairyland; but she would not answer, evaded his questions, watched the ducks swim after the pieces of bread a lady was throwing to them, and seemed embarrassed, as if he had touched on a tender spot.

Then, to change the subject, she talked about her life at Roncières, and about her grandmother to whom she used to read aloud for a long time every day, and who must be very sad and lonely now.

Listening to her, the painter felt as blithe as a bird, blither than he had ever felt in his life. All she told him, all the precise, futile, ordinary details of the simple life of a little girl, amused and interested him.

"Let's sit down," he said.

They sat down near the water. And the two swans came and floated in front of them, hoping for some-

thing to eat.

Bertin felt the stir of memories — those lost memories that are drowned in oblivion and return suddenly, no one knows why. They surged up in a swift flood, memories of every kind, and in such numbers, too, that it seemed to him as though a hand were shaking out the storehouse of his mind.

He wondered what had caused this uprush of his former life: he had felt it and noticed it several times already, but never so vividly as to-day. There was always some cause for these sudden recollections, a material and simple cause — often a smell, a perfume. How often, a woman's dress, passing by with a faint whiff of some scent, had evoked a whole chain of forgotten things! Often, too, at the bottom of an old flask of toilet-water he had rediscovered fragments of his own existence; and all the straying perfumes of streets, fields, and houses and furniture - sweet or unpleasant — the warm perfumes of a summer's evening, the chilly ones of a winter's evening always woke in his mind dim memories, as if the odours were full of dead embalmed things, as memories are preserved in aromatic herbs.

Was it the damp grass or the chestnut flowers that thus awakened the past? Not that; then what? Was it to his eye that he owed this summons? What had he seen? Nothing. Among the people they had met, perhaps there was one who bore a resemblance to a face of former times, and had stirred, in his heart — though he had not recognised it — all the

echoes of a vesterday.

Was it not rather a sound? Often a piano heard by chance, an unknown voice, even a barrel-organ playing an out-of-date tune in a square, had snatched twenty years from him and flooded his heart with a forgotten love.

But the flood of memories rushed on, incessant and inapprehensible, almost irritating. What was there about him and near him to rekindle his dead

emotions like this?

"It is getting a little chilly," he said; "let's go on."

They got up and started to walk again.

He looked at the poor people sitting on the benches, those for whom a chair meant too great an expense.

Annette noticed them too now, and their lives and professions filled her with solicitude. She was surprised that, looking as miserable as they did, they came to lounge in this way in this beautiful public garden.

And even more surely than a moment ago Olivier felt his feet wandering down the path of years that were gone. It seemed to him as though a fly were buzzing at his ears, filling them with the vague droning of departed days.

The girl, seeing him day-dreaming, asked him:

"What is the matter? You seem sad."

And his very heart quivered. Who had said that? She or her mother? Not her mother with her present voice, but with her voice of other times, that voice so changed that he had only just recognised it.

He answered with a smile.

"Nothing. You amuse me very much. You are

very nice. You remind me of your mother."

How was it he had not remarked sooner that strange echo of the voice once so familiar, which came now from fresh lips?

"Tell me more," he said.

"What about?"

"Tell me what your governesses made you learn. Did you like them?"

She started chattering again.

And he listened, seized by a growing disquiet.

Among the phrases of this little girl who was almost a stranger to his heart, he was watching and waiting for a word, a sound, a laugh, that seemed to have taken up their abode in her throat with the passing of her mother's youth. Now and then an intonation would make him thrill with amazement. Yes; there were such points of difference between their voices that he had not immediately noticed their likeness, and such differences that often he could no longer see any resemblance at all; but this difference only served to make more striking the sudden reminiscences of her mother's speech. So far he had marked with a friendly, curious eye the likeness in their faces. But the mystery of this resurrected voice blended them one with the other so that when he turned his head away from the girl he sometimes wondered if it were not the comtesse speaking to him thus, twelve years ago.

Then, when he turned to her again, still under the spell of the memories she evoked, her glance, as he met it, made him feel a little faint, as her mother's glance had done, in the first days of their love.

They had already walked three times round the park, always passing the same people, the same nurses and the same children.

Annette was looking now at the mansions surrounding the garden, and asking the names of the people who lived there.

She wanted to know all about these people, questioned him with a greedy curiosity, seemed to be storing her woman's memory with information; her face shone with interest, and she listened with her eyes as much as with her ears.

But as they came to the pavilion separating the two gates on the outer Boulevard, Bertin noticed that four o'clock was just going to strike.

"Oh! We must go home," he said.

And, walking slowly, they reached the Boulevard Malesherbes.

After leaving the young girl, the painter went down towards the Place de la Concorde to pay a call on the other side of the Seine.

He sang to himself; he wanted to run; he would gladly have jumped over the seats; he felt so active that Paris seemed to him radiant, prettier than ever. "It's true," he thought, "the spring makes everyone

young again."

He was in one of those moods when the excited brain seizes on everything with a sharper pleasure; when the eye sees better and seems clearer and more impressionable; when one savours a keener joy in seeing and feeling, as though an all-powerful hand had just renewed all the colours of the earth, put fresh life into the movements of all creatures, and wound up within us, like a watch that has stopped, the activity of our sensations.

He thought, as his glance took in a thousand amusing sights: "To imagine that there are times when

I can't find a subject for a picture!"

And he felt his brain so free and lucid that all his work as an artist seemed to him quite ordinary; and he conceived a new and truer and more original way of expressing life. And suddenly he was seized with the desire to go home and work, so that he retraced his steps and shut himself up in his studio.

But as soon as he was alone in front of the canvas

he had started, the ardour that had burned in his blood a moment ago abruptly left him. He felt tired,

sat down on his divan and dreamed.

The sort of happy indifference in which he lived, the contentment of a satisfied man whose needs are almost all supplied, quietly left his heart, as if something had failed to him. He felt his house empty, and his great studio a wilderness. Then, looking round him, he seemed to see passing, the shadow of a woman whose presence was dear to him. It was long since he had known the impatience of a lover waiting for his mistress to return; and now suddenly he felt that she was far away and he wanted her near him with all the nervous restlessness of a young man.

He was filled with tenderness to think how greatly they had loved in this huge appartement to which she had come so often, discovered innumerable recollections of her, of her gestures, her words, her kisses. He remembered certain days, certain hours, certain moments; and he felt about him the light touch of

former caresses.

He got up, incapable of remaining where he was, and began to walk about, thinking again that, in spite of this relationship that had taken up all his life, he remained very lonely, always lonely. After the long hours of work, when he looked about him, dazed like a man coming back to life, he saw and felt nothing but walls to touch and speak to. Having no wife at home and able to meet the woman he loved only by taking the precautions of a thief, he had been forced to spend his idle hours in all the public places where a man can find or buy some

means or other of killing time. On definite days he was in the habit of going to the club, to the Cirque, to the Hippodrome, to the opera — everywhere — so that he did not have to stay at home, where doubtless he would have remained gladly, had she been near him.

Formerly, in moments of wild passion, he had suffered cruelly because he was not able to take her and keep her with him. Then his ardour cooled and had accepted unrebelling their separation and his freedom. Now he regretted them anew, as if he were falling in love again.

And this return of passion came upon him so unexpectedly, almost for no reason at all — because it had been pleasant outside, and perhaps because he had just recognised this woman's voice grown young again. How little it needs to move the heart of a man, a man who is growing old, for whom to

remember is to regret!

As in olden days, the need to see her seized him, invaded mind and body like a fever. He began to think of her rather as if he were a young man in love, getting ecstatic about her in his heart and working himself into a state of ecstasy, to make himself desire her the more. Then, although he had seen her in the morning, he decided to go and take a cup of tea with her, that very evening.

The hours seemed long to him; and as he went out to go to the Boulevard Malesherbes he was seized with a sharp fear that he would not find her in, and be forced to pass this evening too all alone — as

indeed he had passed so many others.

To his question, "Is the comtesse at home?" the

servant answered: "Yes, sir"; and his heart leapt

for joy.

He cried gaily: "It is I again," as he appeared on the threshold of the small drawing-room, where the two women were working under the rose-coloured shades of a lamp with two branches made of Britannia metal, and supported by a tall, thin pedestal.

The comtesse cried out:

"Oh! is it you! How splendid!"

"Yes. I felt very lonely and so I have come."

"That's very nice of you."
"Are you expecting anyone?"

"No - possibly. . . . I never know."

He sat down and watched with an air of disdain the thick grey woollen knitting that they were making swiftly on long wooden needles.

He asked:

"What is that?"

"Coverlets."

"For the poor?"

"Yes, of course."
"It is very ugly."

"It is very warm."

"Possibly; but it is very ugly, particularly in a Louis XV room where everything is pleasing to look at. If not for your poor, at any rate for your friends' sake you ought to make your charities a little smarter."

"Oh! — you men!" she said, with a shrug of her shoulders. "People are making coverlets like this everywhere, nowadays."

"I am aware of it, only too well aware of it. It

is impossible to pay an evening call without seeing this frightful grey rag on the prettiest dresses and the daintiest pieces of furniture. This spring's benevolence is in bad taste."

The comtesse, to judge of the truth of what he said, stretched out the knitting in her hand on the empty, silk-covered chair beside her; then agreed indifferently:

"Yes, you are right; it is ugly."

And she started working again. Over the two heads bent side by side under two near-by lamps, poured a flood of rosy light; it poured across their hair, spread over their faces, their dresses and their restless hands. They looked at their work with the easy, sustained attention of women whose fingers work at familiar tasks, while their eye follows it and their mind never thinks about it at all.

In the four corners of the room, four other lamps in Chinese porcelain, supported on old pedestals of gilded wood, poured over the tapestries a gentle and even light, softened by lace shades thrown over the globes.

Bertin took a very low seat — a baby arm-chair — in which he could just sit down, but where he always preferred to sit and talk to the comtesse; he was almost at her feet.

She said to him:

"You went for a long walk with Nané just now,

in the park."

"Yes, we chattered like two old friends. I like your daughter very much. She is exactly like you. There are some phrases she says that sound as though you had left your voice behind in her mouth."

"My husband has told me so several times

already."

He watched them working, bathed in the bright lamplight; and the thought that often pained him, that had pained him during this day — the horror of his deserted house, still silent and cold, whatever the weather, whatever the heat of the fires or of the radiator — distressed him now as if he were just

realising his loneliness for the first time.

Oh! How dearly he would have liked to be the husband of this woman, and not her lover! In the old days he always wanted to take her away, to snatch her from this man, to steal her from him altogether. To-day he was jealous of the deceived husband who lived his whole life near her and knew the ways of her house and the seductive charm of her nearness. As he looked at her, he felt his heart full of old things come back again; he would have liked to say them to her. Truly he was still very fond of her — even a little fonder — much more so to-day than he had been for a long time. He so longed to tell her about this return of his youthful emotions, which would make her so happy that he wished the young girl would be sent to bed with all speed.

He was obsessed by this desire to be alone with her; to sit beside her knees and there lay his head; to take her hands that would drop the poor man's coverlet, the wooden needles and the ball of wool that would roll away under a chair at the end of an unravelled strand. He kept looking at the time, scarcely spoke and concluded that people really should not allow little girls to pass the evening with

grown-ups.

The silence of the neighbouring drawing-room was disturbed by the sound of steps, and the servant's head appeared announcing:

"M. de Musadieu."

Olivier Bertin was filled for a moment with a concentrated rage; and when he shook the hand of the Inspector of Fine Arts, he felt a longing to take him

by the shoulders and fling him outside.

Musadieu was bubbling over with news. The Ministry was going to fall, and a scandal was being whispered abroad about the Marquis de Rocdiane. He glanced at the young girl and added: "I will tell you that a little later."

The comtesse looked up at the clock and noticed

that it was just on ten.

"It is bedtime, my child," she said to her daughter.

Annette folded her knitting without replying, rolled up her wool, kissed her mother on the cheeks, gave her hand to the men and went out quickly, as though she had glided past without a movement of the air as she went.

When she had gone out, the comtesse asked:

"Well! and your piece of scandal."

People were making out that the Marquis, separated on excellent terms from his wife who paid him an allowance in his opinion insufficient, had discovered a certain and remarkable means of doubling it. The Marquise, who had been watched at his instigation, had let herself be caught flagrante delicto, and had had to buy off at the cost of a fresh allowance the prosecution brought by the commissioner of police.

The comtesse listened, with an expression of curi-

osity, her hands motionless, holding her interrupted

work upon her knees.

Bertin, who found Musadieu's presence thoroughly exasperating now that the girl had gone, became very angry; and declared, with the indignation of a man who knows and has been unwilling to utter such a calumny about anybody, that it was a hideous lie, one of those disgraceful pieces of tittle-tattle that people in good society ought never to listen to or repeat. He was standing against the mantelpiece now, very angry, and talking in the nervous fashion of a man inclined to make a personal matter of the story.

Rosdiane was a friend of his; and if in a few cases he had laid himself open to blame for a certain laxity, one could never accuse him or even suspect him of a really dishonourable act. Musadieu, surprised and embarrassed, defended himself, withdrew, excused

himself.

"Pardon me," he said, "I heard this story just now at the Duchesse de Mortemain's."

Bertin asked:

"Who told it to you? A woman no doubt."

"Not at all; the Marquis de Farandal." The painter, thoroughly irritated, replied:

"It doesn't surprise me at all to hear it of him."

There was a silence. The comtesse picked up her work. Then Olivier went on calmly:

"I know for a fact that it is false."

Actually he knew nothing about it, this being the first time he had heard the story mentioned.

Musadieu prepared to retract, feeling the situation

dangerous; and was just beginning to talk of going to call on the Corbelles, when the Comte de Guilleroy returned from dining in the town.

Bertin sat down again overwhelmed: he felt hope-

less of getting rid of the husband yet.

"Have you heard," said the comte, "the great scandal that's going about this evening?"

As no one answered, he went on:

"It seems that Rocdiane surprised his wife in scandalous circumstances and has made her pay very heavily for the indiscretion."

At that, Bertin, with a grieved air, sorrow in his voice and gesture, placed a hand on Guilleroy's knee and repeated in gentle and friendly terms what he

had just almost thrown in Musadieu's face.

And the comte, half convinced, and annoyed that he had lightly repeated a doubtful and perhaps compromising story, pleaded his ignorance and his innocence. People do indeed repeat so many false and malicious things!

They were suddenly all agreed on this point; that the world shows a deplorable facility in accusation, suspicion and calumny. And for five minutes all four of them appeared to share a conviction that all whispered stories are false, that women never have the lovers they are supposed to have, that men never commit the infamous actions they are credited with, and that in short the surface is much more ugly than the interior.

Bertin, who had ceased to be annoyed with Musadieu after the comte's arrival, began to flatter him, started him on his pet subjects and opened the floodgates of his eloquence. And the comte seemed de-

lighted, like a man who brings peace and goodwill wherever he goes.

Two servants, their steps muffled by the carpet, came in with the tea-table; the boiling water steamed in a dainty apparatus that shone in the blue flame

of a spirit lamp.

The comtesse got up and prepared the hot beverage with all the care and precautions that the Russians have introduced among us. Then she offered a cup to Musadieu, and another to Bertin, and returned with plates containing *foie-gras* sandwiches and dainty Austrian and English pastries.

The comte went up to the dumb-waiter, on which was an array of syrups and liqueurs and glasses, mixed himself a grog and then discreetly slipped into

the next room and disappeared.

Again Bertin found himself alone facing Musadieu; and he was again suddenly seized with the desire to throw this bore out of the house; he had been set going now and was declaiming, scattering anecdotes broadcast, repeating witticisms and making fresh ones himself. And the painter threw constant glances at the clock whose big hand was approaching midnight. The comtesse saw his glance, understood that he wanted to speak to her; and with that skill which enables society women to change the tone of a conversation and the atmosphere of a drawing-room by the most delicate modulations of the voice, so that a visitor understands, without a word said, whether he is to stay or go, she managed - by her mere attitude, by the expression on her face and the bored look in her eyes -- to spread as great a coldness round her as if she just opened a window.

Musadieu felt this draught freezing his ideas and without asking himself why, he suddenly conceived

a desire to get up and go.

Bertin imitated his movement for courtesy's sake. The two men retired together, crossing the two drawing-rooms and accompanied by the comtesse, who kept on talking to the painter. She kept him back on the threshold of the hall to make some explanation or other, while Musadieu put on his overcoat, with the help of a footman. Mme. de Guilleroy continued to talk with Bertin, and the Inspector of Fine Arts, after waiting a few seconds beside the door on to the staircase held open by another servant, resolved to go out alone rather than remain standing opposite the footman.

The door was gently closed upon him and with the most natural air in the world, the comtesse said

to the artist:

"But, really, why are you going so soon? It is not midnight yet. Stay a little while longer."

And they returned together to the small drawing-

room.

As soon as they were seated, he said:

"Good Lord! How that creature annoyed me!"

"Why?"

"He stole part of you from me."

"Oh! not much!"

"Possibly not, but he aggravated me."

"Are you jealous?"

"It is not necessarily jealousy to find a man in

the way."

He had retaken possession of his little arm-chair, and was sitting very near her now. His fingers

caressed the stuff of her dress as he told her what a warm tide of love had flooded his heart that day.

She listened to him, surprised and delighted, and softly placed one hand on his white hair, stroking it gently, as though to thank him.

"I want so much to live with you," he said.

He was thinking all the time of that husband in bed asleep, probably in a neighbouring room; and he went on:

"Nothing but marriage can really unite two lives." Full of pity for him and for herself, she murmured:

"My poor darling."

He had placed his cheek on the comtesse's knees and was looking at her tenderly, looking with a rather melancholy tenderness, rather mournful, and less ardent than a moment ago, when he was separated from her by her daughter, her husband and Musadieu.

She said, smiling and still fondling Olivier's head

with her slender fingers:

"Oh! how white you are! Your last black hairs have gone."

"Alas, I know! It comes on so quickly."

She was afraid she had saddened him.

"Oh, but you got grey very early. You've been pepper and salt ever since I knew you."

"Yes, that's true."

To blot out the last shadow of the regret she had aroused, she leaned towards him and, raising his head between her hands, pressed on his forehead a few slow tender kisses, those slow kisses that seem as though they must never end.

Then they looked at one another, trying to see

their love reflected in the depths of their eyes.

"I should like," he said, "to pass a whole day with you."

He was tormented by a vague inexplicable longing for intimacy.

A moment ago, he had thought that the departure of the people who were there would give him opportunity to satisfy the desire that had stirred in him that morning; and now that he was alone with his mistress, now that he had her warm hands on his brow and through her dress felt her body warm against his cheek, he was filled still with the same inner disquiet and the same indefinable, elusive yearning for love.

And now he thought that, out of this house, in the woods, perhaps, where they would be quite alone, without anyone near them, his heart's unrest would

be calmed and quieted.

She replied:

"What a baby you are! We see one another

almost every day."

He begged her to make an opportunity to come and lunch with him somewhere in the neighbourhood of Paris, as they had done four or five times.

She was surprised at this whim, so difficult to put into practice now that her daughter had returned.

She would try, however, as soon as her husband had gone to Les Ronces, but there was no possibility of that happening until after the varnishing the following Saturday.

"And till then, when shall I see you?"

"To-morrow at the Corbelles'! And come here too on Thursday at three, if you are free; and I think we are dining together at the Duchesse's."

"Yes, certainly."

He got up.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my darling."

He remained standing, unable to make up his mind to go; he had got said scarcely anything of all that he came to say to her; and his mind was full of things unuttered, and seething with vague unexpressed emotions.

"Good-bye," he repeated, and took hold of her hands.

"Good-bye, my darling."

"I love you."

She gave him such a sweet look as a woman can give a man, in that one look expressing all that she had given him.

With a throbbing heart he repeated for the third

time:

"Good-bye."

And he went on the word.

t seemed as though all the carriages in Paris were making pilgrimage that day to the Palais d'Industrie. From nine in the morning, they started arriving by every street, avenue and bridge at this market-place of the fine arts, whither artistic Paris was inviting fashionable Paris to witness the supposed varnishing of three thousand four hundred pictures.

A queue of people besieged the doors, and, disdaining the sculpture, went up immediately to the picture galleries. Already, as they climbed the stairs they began to look up at the canvases exhibited on the walls of the staircase, where they hang that particular class of painters who have sent works either of unusual proportions or such as they have not dared to refuse. The square salon was one seething mass of noisy, jostling people. The painters, who were on view until the evening, made themselves conspicuous by their activity, by the ringing tones of their voices, and the authority of their gestures. They began to drag their friends by the sleeve towards pictures which they pointed out with waving arms and exclamations, and all the energetic dumb-show of connoisseurs. There were painters of every description - tall and long-haired, dressed in soft grey or black hats of indescribable shape, wide and round like roofs with sloping brims shading the

whole upper part of their bodies. Others were small and active, slender or thickset, with silk handkerchiefs round their necks, wearing jackets or encased in strange costumes, peculiar to the race of daubers.

There was the group of dandies, the bloods, the artists of fashion; the academic group, very correct and adorned with red rosettes, huge or tiny, according to their ideas of good form and elegance; the group of bourgeois painters supported by entire families surrounding the father like a triumphal choir.

On the four huge panels, the canvases honoured by admission to the square salon dazzled at first glance by their brilliant hues and flaring frames and the crudity of fresh colours, brightened by varnish and blinding in the harsh light falling from above.

Immediately opposite the door was a portrait of the President of the Republic, while on another wall a gold-braided general with a hat trimmed with ostrich feathers, and red cloth breeches, rubbed shoulders with quite naked nymphs under willow-trees, and a ship in distress that was being almost engulfed by a wave. An old-time bishop excommunicating a barbarian king, a street in the East covered with plague-stricken dead, and Dante's shade on a trip to the Nether Regions, seized and held the eye of the beholder with an irresistible violence of expression.

Besides all this, the colossal room contained a cavalry charge, some sharp-shooters in a wood, cows in a pasture, two great lords of the last century duelling at a street corner, a madwoman sitting on a milestone, a priest giving the sacrament to a dying

man, haymakers, rivers, a sunset, a moonlight scene, samples in short of all that painters have painted, paint and always will paint until the crack of doom.

Olivier was standing in the midst of a group of famous colleagues, members of the Institut and of the Selection Committee, and exchanging views with them. He was oppressed by a certain uneasiness and a feeling of dissatisfaction with his exhibit, which, in spite of all the warm congratulations, he did not think really successful.

He sprang forward. The Duchesse de Mortemain

had just appeared at the entrance.

She asked him:

"Has not the comtesse come yet?"

"I have not seen her."
"And M. de Musadieu?"

"Nor him either."

"He had promised me to be at the top of the staircase at ten o'clock to conduct me through the rooms."

"Will you allow me to take his place, your Grace?"

"No. No. Your friends want you. We shall meet again directly; I think we are lunching together."

Musadieu came running up. He had been detained a few minutes at the sculpture and made breathless excuses.

"This way, your Grace, this way. We will begin

from the right."

They had just disappeared in a sea of heads, when the Comtesse de Guilleroy came in, leaning on her daughter's arm and looking about for Olivier Bertin.

He saw them and hastened up, and as he paid his

respects said:

"Heavens! How pretty they are! Really Annette

gets prettier and prettier. She has changed in one week."

He looked at her with his critical eye, and added:

"Her lines are softer and more melting, and her complexion brighter. She is already much less of the little girl and much more of the fashionable lady."

But suddenly he returned to the big business of

the day.

"Let us begin from the right; we will catch up with

the Duchesse."

The comtesse, who was well up in everything to do with painting and as absorbed as an exhibitant, asked:

"What is the general opinion?"

"Very good salon. A remarkable Le Bonnet, two excellent Carolus Durans, an admirable Puvis de Chavannes, an astonishing Roll — very new — an exquisite Gervex and several others — Béraud, Gazin, Duez — a crowd of good things in fact."

"And you," she said.

"Oh, people compliment me on it, but I am not satisfied."

"You never are."

"Yes, sometimes. But to-day, really I think I am right."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Let us go and look at it."

When they arrived in front of the picture — two little peasant girls bathing in a stream — they found a knot of people stopping to admire it. She was filled with joy and whispered:

"But it's delightful — a jewel! You have never

never done anything better."

He pressed himself close to her — loving her and grateful for every word that soothed a pain and dressed a wound. And a series of arguments rushed through his mind to convince him that she was right, that her society woman's intelligent eye must see truly. To allay his fears, he forgot that for twelve years he had been reproaching her with a too great admiration for the rogueries, the charming prettinesses, the expressed sentiment and the bastard colouring that were in vogue instead of art, art alone and freed from the ideas, tendencies and prejudices of society.

He drew them on. "Let us pass along," he said. And he took them about for a long time from room to room, showing them the canvases and explaining the subjects, happy in their company, and happy

because of their company.

Suddenly the comtesse asked:

"What is the time?"
"Half past twelve."

"Oh, come along to lunch quickly! The Duchesse must be waiting for us at Ledoyen's, where she told me to bring you if we did not come across her in the rooms."

The restaurant, situated in the middle of an island of trees and shrubs, looked like an overfull and busy hive. A confused babble of voices and shouts and the clatter of plates and glasses hovered in the air and poured out through all the windows and wide-open doors. The closely packed tables surrounded by people feeding were laid in long lines down the neighbouring paths, to right and left of the narrow passage where the waiters ran up and down,

dazed and half out of their wits, bearing at arms'

length dishes laden with meat, fish or fruit.

Under the circular gallery there was such a host of men and women that it was a mere moving and conglomerate mass. They were all laughing, shouting, eating and drinking, excited by the wines and in the full spate of one of those floods of gaiety that sometimes sweep over Paris, on the heels of the sun.

A waiter took the comtesse, Annette and Bertin up to the private dining-room where the Duchesse

was waiting for them.

When they went in, the painter saw, standing by his aunt, the Marquis de Farandal, all smiles and attentions, stretching out his hands to take their parasols and cloaks from the comtesse and her daughter. He felt so disgusted that he was seized with the sudden desire to say cutting and unkind

things.

The Duchesse explained that she had met her nephew and that Musadieu had been taken off by the Minister of Fine Arts. And at the thought that this insipid fop of a Marquis was to marry Annette, that he had come for her and regarded her as already destined to share his couch, Bertin was sickened and revolted as if someone had overlooked and violated some mysterious and sacred right of his.

As soon as they were at table, the Marquis, who was placed by the girl's side, devoted himself to her with the ardent air of a man who has received per-

mission to pay his court.

He looked at her curiously, in what seemed to the painter a bold and critical manner, smiled in an almost tender and satisfied fashion, and displayed

an intimate and privileged gallantry. In his behaviour and his words there was a certain decisiveness, as it were the announcement of a forthcoming usurpation.

The Duchesse and the comtesse seemed to protect and approve this apparent courtship, and glanced

at one another meaningly.

As soon as lunch was over, they returned to the exhibition. There was such a struggling crowd in the rooms that it seemed impossible to get inside. A warmth of humanity, and a sickly smell of coats and dresses grown old upon the body, created a thick foul atmosphere. People were no longer looking at the pictures, but at the faces and dresses, and searching for people they knew. And from time to time there was a heave in this compact mass as it opened momentarily to make way for the tall steps of the varnishers, who were calling out: "Mind yourselves, ladies and gentlemen; mind yourselves."

After five minutes the comtesse and Olivier found themselves separated from the others. He wanted to look for them; but she leaned against him and

said:

"Aren't we all right as we are? Let us leave them, since it is understood that if we lose one another we are to meet again at four at the buffet."

"True," he said.

But he was absorbed with the idea that the Marquis was with Annette and still chattering to her with his fatuous gallantry.

The comtesse murmured: "Do you still love me?"

Absent-mindedly, he replied:

"Yes. Oh, yes."

And he tried to catch sight of M. de Farandal's grey hat, over the heads of the crowd.

Finding him preoccupied, and anxious to bring his

thoughts back to herself, she went on:

"If only you knew how I adore your this year's

picture! It is your masterpiece."

He smiled, suddenly forgetting the young people only to remember his anxiety of the morning.

"Really? You think so?"

"Oh! I like it better than all."

"It has given me a great deal of trouble."

With soft coaxing phrases, she drew him to her again, knowing from long experience that nothing has more power over an artist than tender and sustained flattery. Captivated, enlivened, and gladdened by her gentle words, he began to talk again, seeing and hearing only her in all this great floating mass.

To thank her, he murmured in her ear:

"I want to kiss you madly."

A warm thrill ran through her, and, raising her shining eyes to his, she repeated her question:

"Do you still love me, then?"

And he replied with the intonation she longed for and a moment before had missed:

"Yes, I love you, my dearest Any."

"Come and see me often in the evening," she said. "Now that I have my daughter, I shall not go out much."

As soon as she felt in him this unexpected return of affection, a great happiness took hold on her. With Olivier's white hairs and the quietude that comes with the years, she had less fear now that another woman would attract him, but she was still horribly afraid that he might get married from dread of loneliness. This fear, an old fear now, grew sharper with the years, and drove her to imagine impossible schemes for keeping him near her as much as possible and for saving him from long evenings spent in the cold silence of his empty house. Since she could not always attract and hold him, she suggested amusements, sent him to the theatre and drove him into society, preferring to know that he was surrounded by women rather than by the gloom of his house.

She went on, replying to his secret thought:

"Oh, if I could only keep you always! How I should spoil you! Promise to come and see me very often, since I shall scarcely go out at all."

"I promise you."

A voice in her ear murmured:

"Mummy."

The comtesse started, and turned round. Annette, the Duchesse and the Marquis had just rejoined them.

"It is four o'clock," said the Duchesse. "I am very tired and want to go away."

The comtesse answered:

"I am going too. I can't stand it any longer."

They gained the inner staircase running from the gallery where the drawings and water-colours are displayed, and commanding the huge glass-covered garden where the sculptures are exhibited.

From the landing of this staircase they could see the whole stretch of the great greenhouse filled with statues arranged along the paths, round plots of green

shrubs, and above the heads of the crowd that covered the alleys with its restless black tide. The marbles thrust up from this dark shroud of hats and shoulders, piercing it in a thousand places, and so white that they seemed luminous.

As Bertin said good-bye to the ladies at the exit,

Mme. de Guilleroy whispered to him:

"Then you will come this evening."

"Yes."

And he returned to the Exhibition to discuss with

the artists the impressions of the day.

The painters and sculptors stood in groups round the statues and before the buffet; and there, as every year, they carried on a discussion, supporting and attacking the same ideas with the same arguments about works that were almost identical. Olivier usually got very excited at these discussions, having a knack for disconcerting retorts and attacks and a reputation as a witty theorist of which he was proud. He tried to warm himself up, but the replies he made from habit interested him no more than those he heard, and he wanted to go away: he did not want to listen or to understand any more, knowing beforehand just what would be said on these old artistic problems with whose every aspect he was familiar.

He liked these things, however, and until now had liked them almost exclusively. But to-day his interest in them was distracted by one of those slight and tenacious preoccupations, one of those little cares that seem as though they ought never to affect us and yet are there in spite of all, behind all our words and actions, piercing our thoughts like an invisible

pin buried in the flesh.

He had even forgotten his doubts about his Baigneuses, only to remember the unpleasing conduct of the Marquis with regard to Annette. After all, what did it matter to him? Had he any right there? Why should he have wanted to prevent this precious marriage that had already been decided and was desirable from every point of view? But no argument could blot out the impression of distaste and dissatisfaction that had invaded him at the sight of Farandal speaking and smiling as though they were engaged and caressing the girl's face with his glance.

When he arrived that evening at the comtesse's and found her alone with her daughter still working in the lamplight at their knitting for the poor, he restrained himself with the utmost difficulty from saying disparaging and cutting things about the Marquis and opening Annette's eyes to all the conven-

tionality concealed under his suave manner.

For many years now, during these after-dinner calls, he had allowed himself to indulge in the rather sleepy silences and careless attitudes of an old friend who no longer stands on ceremony. Buried deep in his arm-chair, his legs crossed and head thrown back, he dreamed as he talked and rested mind and body in an intimate tranquillity. But now he suddenly returned to the wide-awake eager manner of a man who is exerting himself to please, studies what he shall say, and seeks, when certain people are in the room, the most brilliant or unusual words to clothe and adorn his thoughts. He no longer let the conversation flag, but maintained and enlivened it, lashing it with his wit. And when he had made the comtesse and her daughter laugh heartily, when he

felt them moved, when he saw them lift surprised eyes to him, or when they stopped working to listen to him, he experienced a pleasurable thrill, a little quiver of success which repaid him for his trouble.

He came again now, whenever he knew they were alone, and never perhaps had he ever passed such

delightful evenings.

Mme. de Guilleroy, whose constant fears were allayed by this devotion, did her best to attract and keep him. She refused dinners in the town, calls, and entertainments, in order to have the pleasure of dropping in the telegraph-box, when she went out at three o'clock, the little blue note saying: "Till by and by." At first, anxious to give him sooner the tête-à-tête he wanted, she sent her daughter to bed as soon as ten o'clock began to strike. Then one day she saw that he was surprised and he asked laughingly that Annette should not be treated any longer as a silly child, and she allowed her a quarter of an hour's grace, then half an hour and then an hour. And he did not stay long after the girl was gone, as though half the charm that kept him in this drawingroom had just left it with her. As soon as they were alone, he would draw up the little low seat he liked best to the comtesse's feet and sit quite near her, now and then, with an affectionate movement, resting his cheek against her knees. She would give him one of her hands to hold in his and his agitation would abruptly leave him; he would stop talking and seem to rest in a tender silence after the effort he had made.

After a while her woman's instinct told her that Annette attracted him almost as much as herself. She was not at all hurt by the knowledge, happy that he could find between them something of the family of which she had deprived him. And she imprisoned him as much as she could between the two of them, playing at being the mother so that he almost believed himself to be the father of this little girl and a new subtlety of affection was added to all that charmed him in this house.

Her coquetry, always alive, but tinged with anxiety as soon as she began to feel on all sides, like pricks, still almost imperceptible, the innumerable ravages of age, took a more active form. To make herself as slender as Annette she continued to refrain from drinking, and the very definite shrinking of her size gave her back her youthful figure so that from the back they were scarcely distinguishable. But her face resented the régime that made it thin. The distended skin went into wrinkles and took on a vellowish hue that made the child's superb freshness the more striking. Then she treated her face with all the paraphernalia of an actress, and although in the daylight she effected a somewhat suspicious whiteness, in the lamplight she achieved that charmingly artificial brilliancy that gives well-painted women an incomparable complexion.

The realisation of this falling off and the employment of artificial aids modified her habits. As much as possible she avoided comparison in the sunlight and courted them in the light of the lamps that gave her an advantage. When she felt tired and pale, older than usual, she had useful nervous headaches that kept her from balls or festivities. But when she felt that she was looking her best, she triumphed and played at the big sister with all the grave modesty

of a young mother. So that she could go on wearing dresses as like her daughter's as possible, she dressed her in the style of a young woman, which was a little old for her; and Annette, who gave every day clearer evidence of possessing a laughing radiant nature, carried it off with a sparkling liveliness that made her prettier still. She lent herself with all her heart to her mother's coquettish tricks, instinctively acted graceful little scenes with her, and knew the right moment to kiss her, to pass her arm tenderly round her waist and show by a gesture, a caress or some ingenious manœuvre how pretty they both were and how alike.

By dint of seeing them together and constantly comparing them, Olivier Bertin almost came at times to confuse them. Sometimes if the girl spoke to him as he was looking somewhere else, he had to ask himself: "Which of them said that?" He often amused himself by playing this game of confusing the two of them, when the three were alone in the drawingroom with the Louis XV tapestries. He used to close his eyes and ask them to address him the same question one after the other, and then changing the order, so that he could try to recognise their voices. They tried so skilfully to get the same intonation, to say the same phrases with the same accent, that often he was unable to guess. In reality they had come to speak so alike that the servants used to answer: "Yes, Madame," to the daughter, and "Yes, Mademoiselle," to the mother.

Through copying one another in jest and through imitating one another's gestures they had attained such an identity of walk and movement that when

M. de Guilleroy himself saw one or the other of them passing through the dark background of the drawing-room he was always confusing them and would ask:

"Is it you, Annette, or you, Mother?"

From this resemblance, natural and deliberate, real and artificial, there was born in the painter's brain the strange impression of a double personality, old and new, very familiar and almost unknown; of two bodies made one after the other with the same flesh; of the same woman reproduced, rejuvenated and become again what she had been. And he lived near them, divided between the two, restless and troubled, feeling his passion for the mother reawakened and wrapping the daughter in a half-realised affection.

PART II

Ι

July 20th, Paris, Eleven P.M.

Darling, my mother has just died at Roncières. We leave at midnight. Do not come, for we are telling no one. But pity me and think of me.

Your Loving Any.

July 21st, Midday.

My poor darling, I should have come in spite of you, if I had not got into the habit of considering all your wishes as commands. I have been thinking of you since vesterday with a bitter grief. I think of that silent journey you have made opposite your daughter and your husband, in the half-lighted carriage that was taking you to your dead. I could see you under the oily lamp, all three of you, you in tears and Annette sobbing. I saw your arrival at the station, the horrible journey in the carriage, the entrance into the castle, surrounded by the servants, your rush towards the staircase, towards that room and that bed where she lies, your first look at her and your kiss upon the thin motionless face. And I thought of your heart, your poor, poor heart, half of which is mine, and which suffers and is broken, which chokes you and which gives me too so much pain.

I kiss your tear-filled eyes with profoundest pity.

OLIVIER.

July 24th, Roncières.

Your letter, darling, would have done me good, if anything could do me good in this terrible distress that has come upon me. We buried her yesterday, and since her poor lifeless body has left this house, it has seemed as though I am alone on earth. One loves one's mother almost without knowing it, without feeling it; for it is as natural as life itself; and one does not realise how deep the roots of this love go until the moment of the last parting. No other affection is quite like this affection; for all the others are fortuitous; this is from birth; all the others are brought to us by the chances of life, this exists from our first day in our very blood. And then, and then, it is not only one's mother one has lost, it is all our childhood itself which is half lost to us: for our life as a little girl belonged as much to her as to us. She alone knew it as we did. She knew a host of far-off things, insignificant yet precious, which are, which were, the sweet first emotions of our heart. To her alone could I still say: "Mother, do you remember the day when . . .? Do you remember the china doll that grandmamma gave me?" We used to whisper over together a long sweet rosary of small absurd memories that no one on earth knows now but I. So it is a part of myself that has died, the older, better part. I have lost the poor heart where the little girl I was still lived entire. Now no one knows her any more; no one remembers the little Anne with her short skirts, her laughter and her expressions.

And a day will come, perhaps it is not far off, when I shall go in my turn, leaving alone in the world

my darling Annette, as Mother leaves me now. How sad and hard and cruel all that is! Yet one never thinks of it. One does not notice death all around taking off someone at every moment, as it will take us soon. If one saw it, if one thought about it, if one was not distracted, amused, blinded by all that passes before us, one could not go on living. The spectacle of this endless massacre would drive us mad.

I am broken, so utterly despairing, that I have no longer the strength to do anything. Day and night I think of my poor mother shut up in that box, buried in that ground, that field. And her old face that I used to kiss so happily is now no more than a frightful corruption. Oh, my darling, how ghastly it all is!

When I lost my father, I had just married, and I did not feel all these things as I do now. Yes, pity me, think of me, write to me. I have so great need of you now.

ANNE.

Paris, July 25th.

My poor darling, your sorrow distresses me dreadfully. And I too no longer see life in roseate hues. Since your departure, I have felt lost, abandoned, without ties and without refuge. Everything tires me, bores me, irritates me. Always I think of you and our Annette. I feel you both so far away when I so much need your presence near me.

It is strange how far away you seem and how I miss you. Never, even when I was young, have you been all to me as you are now. For some time I

have felt the approach of this moment, which should be our St. Luke's Little Summer. My feelings are so odd that I should like to tell you of them. It is strange that since you left I have not been able to go out. Before, even during these last months, I used to love strolling alone along the streets, distracted by things and people, savouring the joy of life and the pleasure of treading the pavement with joyous feet. I used to walk straight ahead not knowing where I was going, for sheer pleasure in walking, breathing the air, and dreaming. Now I can do it no more. As soon as I go into the street a feeling of anguish weighs on me, the fear of a blind man who has lost his dog. I get as anxious as a traveller who has missed the track of a path in a wood, and I have to go home. Paris seems to me empty, horrible and disquieting. I ask myself: "Where am I going to go to?" And reply: "Nowhere; I'm just going for a walk." Well, I cannot, I cannot any longer walk aimlessly. The mere thought of walking straight on crushes me with weariness and overwhelms me with distaste. Then I go and drag my melancholy to the club.

And do you know why? It is solely because you are no longer here. I am sure of it. When I know that you are in Paris, there are no more futile walks, because there is a chance I may meet you in the very first pavement. I can go anywhere, because you may be anywhere. If I do not see you, I may at least find Annette who is an emanation from you. You and she fill the streets with hope for me, with the hope of catching sight of you, whether you approach me from far away, or whether I recognise you from

behind. And then the town becomes delightful to me, and the women whose figures resemble yours throng my heart with all the movement of the streets, entertain my time of waiting, occupy my eyes and give me, as it were, an appetite for the sight of you.

You will think it very selfish of me, my poor darling, to speak thus of my loneliness, like an old cooing pigeon, when you are shedding such pitiful tears. Forgive me: I am so used to being spoiled by you that I shout for help when you are no longer by me.

I kiss your feet, that you may have pity on me.

OLIVIER.

Roncières, July 30th

My darling, thank you for your letter. I have such need to know you love me! I have just gone through some dreadful days. Truly I thought that grief would kill me too. It was within me, like a hard lump of suffering shut within my breast; it grew and grew, choking and strangling me. The doctor who was called in to soothe the nervous crises that attacked me four or five times a day, injected me with morphine, which drove me nearly mad; and the frightful heat that we are having aggravated my condition and threw me into a state of excitement approaching delirium. Since the great storm on Friday I am somewhat calmed. I must tell you that after the day of the funeral I did not cry any more, and then suddenly, during the storm whose approach had prostrated me, I felt the tears beginning to well up from my eyes, slow, rare, little burning tears. Oh! how they hurt, those first tears!

They tore me as though they had been claws, and my throat contracted so that I could no longer breathe. Then the tears began to flow faster, larger, cooler tears. They sprang from my eyes as from a fountain; I cried so many, so very many tears that my handkerchief was soaked and I had to take another. And the great lump of sorrow seemed to become softer, it melted and flowed from my

eyes.

From that moment I have been crying morning and night; and that has been my salvation. One would end in real madness or in death, if one could not cry. Also I am very lonely. My husband walks about the country and I have insisted on his taking Annette to distract and console her a little. They go on horseback or in the carriage as much as eight or ten leagues from Roncières; and she comes back to me all rosy with youth despite her sorrow, and her eyes shining with life, enlivened by the country air and the outing she has taken. How good it is to be that age! I think we are going to be here another fortnight or three weeks. Then, despite the fact that it will be August, we are returning to Paris for the reason you know of.

I send you all there is left to me of my heart.

ANY.

Paris, August 4th.

I can bear it no longer, my darling. You must return, for undoubtedly something is going to happen to me. I begin to think I must be ill; I have taken such a dislike to all the things I have so long been in the habit of doing with a certain pleasure or with

the resignation of indifference. In the first place, it is so hot in Paris, that every night is a veritable Turkish bath lasting eight or nine hours. I get up exhausted by sleeping like this in a sweating-room, and I walk up and down before a white canvas with the intention of drawing something on it. But brain and eye and hand are empty. I'm not a painter any more! . . . This futile effort to work is exasperating. I send for models and I pose them; and because they give me the poses, the gestures, the expressions that I have painted ad nauseam, I make them get dressed again and kick them outside. Truly I can see nothing new; and I am as distressed by it as if I were going blind. What is the meaning of it? Weariness of the eye or of the brain, exhaustion of the artistic faculty or complete failure of the optic nerve? Who knows? Perhaps I have ended my exploration of that corner of the unknown it has been youchsafed me to visit. I see only what is familiar to everyone. I paint what every bad artist has painted. I have only the vision and the observation of a vulgarian. Before — not so very long ago — the number of themes seemed infinite; and I had so many means of expressing them that I hesitated in an embarrassment of choice. And now suddenly the world of half-glimpsed subjects is depopulated and my search has become vain and sterile. The passers-by have no longer any meaning for me. I no longer find in each human being the character and the savour that I loved to discover and interpret. Still, I think I could paint a very pretty portrait of your daughter. Is it because she so strongly resembles you that I confuse you in my mind? Yes, perhaps.

So after I have struggled to sketch a man and a woman different from all the usual models, I decide to go and lunch somewhere, because I can't bear to sit alone in my dining-room nowadays. The Boulevard Malesherbes looks like a forest path imprisoned in a dead city. All the houses exhale emptiness. Along the causeways, the waterers are scattering feathery sprays of white rain that splash the wooden pavement, so that it gives off an odour of wet tar and washed-out stables. From one end to the other of the long incline from Monceau Park to Saint Augustin, there's no one to be seen but six insignificant black figures - tradesmen or servants. The shadow of the plantains makes a curious splash: it looks liquid, like spilled water drying up, on the burning footpaths at the foot of the trees. The stillness of the leaves on the branches and of the grey silhouette on the asphalt expresses the weariness of the baked town, sleepy and perspiring like a workman asleep on a bench in the sun. Yes, she sweats, our jade of a city; and gives off an appalling stench from her drains, and from the ventilators of her cellars and kitchens, and from the gutters where all the sweepings of her streets are flowing. Then I think of those summer mornings in your orchard full of little wild flowers that give a honey-taste to the air. Then already sickened, I enter the restaurant where bald and portly men with half-open waistcoats and damp, shiny foreheads are eating with an air of exhaustion. All the food is hot — the melon that wilts beneath the ice, the soft bread, the flaccid meats, the twice-cooked vegetables, the putrescent cheese and the fruit ripened in the shop window.

And I go out nauseated and I go back home to try

and sleep a little before dining at the club.

There I always find Adelmans, Maldant, Rocdiane, Landa and several others who bore and tire me as much as a barrel-organ would. Each one has his tune, or tunes, that I have been hearing for the last fifteen years, and they play them in unison every evening at the club—a place, it appears, where one goes to amuse oneself. I ought to belong to a different generation. My eyes and ears and brain are surfeited with this one. They are always making conquests of which they boast and on which they congratulate one another.

After having yawned as many times as there are minutes between eight o'clock and midnight, I go to bed and get undressed with the thought that I

have to start it all over again to-morrow.

Yes, my darling, I have reached the age at which a bachelor life becomes insufferable, because there is no new thing for me under the sun. A bachelor must be young, curious and greedy. When one is no longer that, freedom is dangerous. Lord! How I loved my freedom, once, before I came to love you more than it! And how it weighs upon me nowadays! For an old bachelor like me, freedom is just utter emptiness; it is the road to death with nothing in between to hide the ultimate bourne; it is the ceaseless repetition of the question: What am I to do? Whom can I go and see so as not to be alone? And I go from friend to friend, from handshake to handshake, begging a little friendship. And I gather some crumbs, which do not make a mouthful. . . . You, I have you, my darling, but you are not mine. Perhaps

it is to you I owe the anguish I am suffering from. For it is the desire for your touch, for your presence, for the same roof over our heads, the same walls enclosing our existences, the same interest knitting our hearts together—it is the yearning for that community of hopes, of sorrows, pleasures, gaiety, sadness and even of material things—that fills me with so great a heaviness. You are mine—that is to say, I steal a little of you from time to time. But I would wish to breathe constantly the same air that you breathe, to share all with you, use only things belonging to us both, and feel that all that ministers to my life belongs to you as much as to me—the glass from which I drink, the chair I rest in, the bread I eat and the fire that warms me.

Farewell. Come back quickly. I suffer too much

far from you.

OLIVIER.

Roncières, August 8th.

My darling, I am ill and so worn that you will not know me again. I think I have wept too much. I must rest a little before returning; for I do not want to show myself to you as I am. My husband leaves for Paris the day after to-morrow and will bring you news of us. He hopes to take you to dine somewhere, and tells me to ask you to wait for him at your house at about seven o'clock.

As for me, as soon as I feel a little better, as soon as I no longer have this worn-out look that makes me frightened for myself, I will return to you. I too, I have only you and Annette in the world and I want to give each all that I can without robbing the other.

I offer you my eyes that have wept so much, that you may kiss them.

ANNE.

When he received this letter announcing the further postponement of her return, Olivier Bertin was seized by a wild desire to take a carriage to the station and the train to Roncières. Then, reflecting that M. de Guilleroy was to return the next day, he resigned himself and began to long for the husband's arrival with almost as much impatience as if it had been that of the woman herself.

Never had he felt such affection for Guilleroy as

during those twenty-four hours of waiting.

When he saw him come in, he sprang towards him, hands outstretched, crying: "Ah, my dear friend, how glad I am to see you!"

The other man too seemed very pleased; glad above all to return to Paris; for life had not been

very gay in Normandy the last three weeks.

The two men sat down on a little sofa for two, in a corner of the studio, under a dais of oriental stuffs, and shook hands again with an affectionate grip.

"And the comtesse," asked Bertin, "how is

she?"

"Oh, not very well! She has been greatly moved, very much upset; and she gets better too slowly. I confess I am a little anxious about her."

"But why does not she come back?"

"I don't know, I could not persuade her to return here."

"What does she do all day?"

"Good God! She weeps and thinks of her mother.

It is not good for her. I wish she would make up her mind to have a change of air, and leave the place where all that happened, you know."

"And Annette?"

"Oh, she! A flower in bloom."

Olivier smiled with joy. Then he asked again:

"Is she very grieved?"

"Yes, very deeply; but you know, grief at eighteen! . . . It does not last."

After a silence Guilleroy went on:

"Where are we going to dine, my dear fellow? I must thaw out, I must hear some noise and see some movement."

"At this time of year, the Café des Ambassadeurs

is indicated, I think."

And they went out arm in arm towards the Champs Elysées. Guilleroy was filled with the gaiety of a homecoming Parisian, who after each absence from it finds the town rejuvenated and full of possible surprises: he asked the painter a thousand trifling questions about what people had been doing and saying. And Olivier, after giving indifferent replies that reflected all the boredom of his loneliness, spoke of Roncières and tried to grasp in this man and to gather from the air round him that almost material something left in us by people we have just seen—a subtle emanation that we take away when we leave them, and keep in us some hours until it evaporates in the new atmosphere.

The sky of a summer's evening weighed upon the city and on the wide avenues, where the lusty refrains of the open-air concerts were beginning to dance under the leaves. The two men, seated on the

balcony of the Café des Ambassadeurs, could see below them the still empty seats and chairs of the enclosure as far as the little theatre, where the wan daylight struggled with the light of the electric globes, and the singers displayed their dazzling dresses and the rosy hue of their flesh. The odour of frying, of sauces and hot dishes floated on the imperceptible breezes wafted to them by the chestnut-trees, and when a woman went by looking for her reserved table and followed by a man in evening dress, she scattered in her wake the fresh, heady perfume of her clothes and her body.

Guilleroy murmured, radiant:

"Oh! I like this place better than down there!"

"And I," replied Bertin, "would rather be down there than here."

"Oh, come!"

"My God! I find Paris impossible, this summer."

"But, my dear man, it is always Paris."

The deputy seemed to be in a completely happy mood, one of those rare moods of irrepressible effervescence, in which serious men make fools of themselves. He watched two harlots dining at a neighbouring table with three superlatively correct, thin young gentlemen. And he slyly questioned Olivier about all the well-known and oft-quoted prostitutes whose names he heard mentioned every day. Then he murmured in a tone of profound regret:

"You are lucky to have remained a bachelor. You

can do and see such a lot of things."

But the painter cried out in protest, and as a man

sorely obsessed by an idea would do, he made Guilleroy the confident of his sorrows and his loneliness. When he had finished, when he had recited the litany of his sorrow to the end, and, pricked by his need to unburden his heart, had artlessly told him how much he had longed for the love and the touch of a woman living at his side, the comte agreed that there was some good in marriage. Then, finding once more his parliamentary eloquence to eulogise the delights of his domestic life, he delivered an encomium upon the comtesse, to which Olivier gravely signified his approval by frequent nods of his head.

Happy to hear her spoken of, but jealous of the homely happiness that Guilleroy felt it his duty to extol, the painter finally murmured with sincere

conviction:

"Yes, you have been lucky!"

The deputy was flattered and agreed. Then he went on:

"I should like to see her back. She really makes me anxious just now. Look here, since you are bored in Paris, you ought to go to Roncières and bring her back again. She will listen to you, since you are her greatest friend. Whereas a husband . . . you know . . . "

Delighted, Olivier replied:

"I'd like nothing better. Still . . . are you sure it won't annoy her to see me turn up in this way?"

"No, not in the least; go by all means, my dear

fellow."

"Very well, then. I shall leave to-morrow by the one o'clock train. Shall I send a wire?"

"No, I will see to that. I will let her know, so

that you will find a carriage at the station."

Since they had finished dinner, they returned to the Boulevards. But after scarcely half an hour the comte abruptly left the painter with the excuse of an urgent matter of business that he had quite forgotten. THE comtesse and her daughter, clad in black crape, had just sat down to lunch in the huge dining-room at Roncières. Naïvely executed portraits of ancestors, one in cuirass, another in short coat, one powdered like an officer of the French Guards and another like a colonel of the Restoration, ranged the regiment of dead Guilleroys along the walls in old frames that were losing their gilt. Two servants with muffled steps began to wait on the two silent women. And the flies made a little cloud of whirling, buzzing specks round the crystal chandelier hung over the centre of the table.

"Open the windows," said the comtesse; "it is

a little chilly here."

The three tall windows, reaching from floor to ceiling and wide as a road, were opened on both sides. A breath of warm air, bearing with it the scent of hot grass and the far-off sounds of the country-side, came in suddenly by these great gaps and mingled with the rather damp atmosphere of the room set deep in the thick walls of the castle.

"Ah! That's nice," said Annette, drawing a deep

breath.

The two women's eyes were turned towards the scene outside. Under a clear blue sky, slightly veiled by the midday haze that gleams on the sun-saturated earth, they looked at the long green stretch of grass in the park, with its islets of trees scattered here and

there, and its prospects opening far over the yellow country-side gleaming to the far sky-line with its carpet of ripe harvest fields.

"We will go for a long walk after lunch," said the comtesse. "We can go on foot as far as Berville by

the river; it would be too hot in the plain."

"Yes, mummy, and we will take Julio to put up the partridges."

"You know your father forbids it."

"Oh, now that daddy is in Paris! It is so funny to see Julio setting. Look! there he is teasing the cows. Oh, dear! How funny he is!"

She pushed back her chair, got up and ran to the

window, shouting: "Go on, Julio! Go on!"

On the grass three heavy cows, sated with grass and overcome by the heat, lay on their sides, with their bellies thrust out by the pressure of the ground. Going from one to the other, barking, and frisking madly, in a mad joyous pretence of anger, a graceful red and white sporting spaniel, his curly ears flopping with every leap, was making violent efforts to put up the three great beasts, who took no notice. That was, indeed, the dog's favourite game, and he must needs start it every time he saw the cows lying down. They looked at him with their moist eyes, annoyed rather than afraid, and turned their heads to follow his movements.

"Fetch it, Julio, fetch it!"

And the spaniel, excited, got bolder, barked louder, and adventured as far as their rumps in the pretence that he was going to bite them. They began to get uneasy, and the nervous quivers of their hides to chase away the flies became longer and more frequent.

Suddenly, carried away by a rush that he could not check in time, the dog arrived full-tilt so near a cow that to avoid butting into her, he had to jump over her. Grazed by his leap, the heavy creature got frightened, and it raised its head and then stood up slowly on its four legs, snorting loudly. Seeing it up, the two others immediately followed suit; and Julio began a dance of triumph round them, while Annette congratulated him.

"Bravo, Julio, bravo!"

"Come along," said the comtesse; "come and eat your lunch, my child."

But the girl, shading her eyes with her hand,

exclaimed:

"Hallo! The telegraph boy."

In the invisible path lost amidst oats and wheat, a blue blouse seemed to be gliding over the top of the corn, whence it approached the castle at the wearer's measured pace.

"Oh!" murmured the comtesse, "I hope to heaven

it is not bad news!"

She shuddered again with the dread that hangs over us so long after we have learnt from a telegram of the death of a beloved person. She could not now tear the gummed fastening to open the little blue document without feeling her fingers tremble and her soul faint within her — without imagining that from these folds which took so long to unseal there would emerge some grief to make her tears flow anew.

Annette, on the other hand, full of youthful curiosity, liked the arrival of anything mysterious. Her heart, that life had just bruised for the first time, could expect only joyous things from the dread black

bag hanging at the side of the postmen, who scatter so many emotions in city streets and country roads.

The comtesse stopped eating, following in spirit the man now approaching her, bringer of a few written words, a few words that would perhaps wound her as though her throat had been cut. Her violent anxiety to know made her gasp for breath; and she tried to guess what could be this so important news. What was it about? Whom about? The thought of Olivier crossed her mind. Could he be ill? Was he dead, too?

The ten minutes' wait seemed to her unending. Then after tearing open the telegram and seeing her husband's name she read: "To tell you that our friend Bertin leaves for Roncières by the one o'clock train. Send phaeton station. Love."

"Well, mummy?" said Annette.

"M. Olivier Bertin is coming to see us."

"Oh, what luck! When?"

"Soon."

"At four o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how nice of him!"

But the comtesse had turned pale. For some time a new anxiety had been growing in her mind; and the sudden arrival of the painter himself seemed a menace as painful as anything she had foreboded.

"You shall go and fetch him in the carriage," she

said to her daughter.

"And you, mummy, aren't you coming?"

"No. I will wait for you here."

"Why? He'll be hurt."
"I don't feel very well."

"You were wanting to walk to Berville just now."

"Yes, but lunch has disagreed with me."

"Just from here to there! It will do you good."
"No, I am going up to my room. Let me know

as soon as you get back."

"Yes, mummy."

Then, after giving orders for the harnessing of the phaeton at the proper time and for the preparation of a room, the comtesse retired to her apartment and locked her door.

Her life until now had slipped away almost free from pain; its sole incident Olivier's love; its sole care the effort to keep him. And she had succeeded in it, ever victorious in that struggle. Her heart, lulled by success and praise, had become the exacting heart of a beautiful society woman to whom are due all the sweet things of earth. And after having consented to a brilliant marriage, where inclination counted for nothing, after having then accepted love as the complement of a happy life, after having played its part in a guilty relationship, partly because she was carried away, partly out of reverence for the sentiment itself, partly to compensate the humdrum vulgarity of life, her heart had entrenched and barricaded itself behind the happiness chance had brought to her, conscious of no other desire than the desire to defend her happiness against the surprises of daily life. So she had accepted with a pretty woman's kindliness the pleasant happenings that presented themselves; and little venturing, little disturbed by new desires and longings for the unknown, affectionate, tenacious and foreseeing, contented with the present, and naturally distrustful of

the morrow, she had been able to enjoy with a sparing and sagacious prudence the things of life that fortune offered her.

Now, little by little, though she dared not admit it to herself, there had crept into her heart a vague, brooding thought of the days that pass and the time to come. There was something like an incessant yearning in her heart. But knowing that this downward slope of life was bottomless and that, once started on the descent, one never stopped, she yielded to the presentiment of danger, closed her eyes and let herself slide so that she could keep her dream, and not be made giddy by the pit or feel the despair of impotence.

So she showed a smiling face to the world, with a sort of fictitious pride that she had remained beautiful so long. And when Annette appeared at her side with the freshness of her eighteen years, instead of being pained by her nearness, she was proud, on the contrary, that she should be preferred, in the sophisticated grace of her maturity, to this blossoming girl in the radiant flower of her first youth.

She even believed herself to be on the threshold of a happy, peaceful time, when her mother's death came to strike her to her inmost heart. During the first days she went through one of those periods of profound despair that leave room for no other thought. From morning till night she remained plunged in gloom, trying to recall a thousand things about the dead woman — familiar expressions, her face as it used to look, dresses she had once worn — as if she had stored a few relics in the bottom of her memory and gathered in the vanished past all the

intimate tender recollections with which to feed her tortured reveries. Then, when she had by these means brought herself to such a violence of despair that she had nervous crises and fainting-fits at every moment, all this stored-up anguish sprang forth in tears and flowed day and night from her eyes.

One morning, when her maid came in and had just opened the shutters and drawn the curtains, asking: "How is Madam to-day?" she replied, feeling exhausted and utterly spent with weeping: "Oh, not at all well. I can't really stand it any longer."

The servant, who was holding the tray with the tea on it, distressed to see her lying so pale in the whiteness of the bed, stammered in tones of sincere sorrow:

"Indeed, Madam looks very ill. Madam would do well to take care of herself."

The tone in which that was said pierced the comtesse's heart like the fine point of a needle; and as soon as the maid had gone she got up to look at her

face in the mirror in her large wardrobe.

She was dumbfounded at the sight of herself, frightened at her hollow cheeks and red eyes, at the ravages produced in her by these few days of suffering. Her face, the face she knew so well, and had so often looked at in so many different mirrors, whose every expression, every prettiness, every smile she knew, so often rectifying its pallor, removing its little wearinesses and smoothing away the slight wrinkles that appeared round her eyes in the too strong sunlight — this face seemed to her suddenly to belong to another woman, a new face, falling to ruin, incurably sick.

The better to see herself and the better to realise this unexpected disaster, she came so near as to touch the glass with her forehead, so that her breath spread a mist over the mirror and obscured, almost blotted out, the pallid reflection she was gazing upon. Then she had to take a handkerchief to wipe away the haze made by her breathing; and, quivering with a strange emotion, she examined long and patiently the change in her face. With a delicate finger she pulled out the skin of her cheeks, smoothed that of her forehead, brushed back her hair and raised her evelids to look at the whites of her eyes. Then she opened her mouth, inspected her slightly dulled teeth where specks of gold glistened, and was shocked at her livid gums and at the vellowish hue of her skin above the cheeks and on the temples.

She was so intent upon this review of her fading beauty that she did not hear the door open, and her very heart gave a spasm when the maid standing

behind her said:

"Madam has forgotten to drink her tea."

The comtesse turned round in confusion, surprised and embarrassed; and the servant, guessing what was in her mind, continued:

"Madam has been crying too much. There is nothing worse than tears for making the skin bloodless. The blood turns to water."

The comtesse added sadly:

"And there is age too." The maid protested:

"Oh, no, madam, it's not that! After a few days' rest it will all be gone. But Madam must go out and take great care not to cry."

As soon as she was dressed the comtesse went down into the park for the first time since her mother's death and visited the little orchard where in former days she had loved to tend and gather flowers. Then she reached the river and walked along the water's edge until it was time for lunch.

She sat down at table opposite her husband and by the side of her daughter, and to find out what

they thought, she asked:

"I feel better to-day. I ought to be looking less pale."

The comte answered:

"Oh! You still look very ill."

She felt a catch at her heart, and her eyes moistened with a desire to cry, for she had got into the habit

of weeping.

Until the evening, and the next day and the days following, whether it was of her mother or of herself she thought, she felt every moment a sob rising in her throat and the tears springing to her eyes; but she forced them back so that they should not flow down and line her cheeks. By a superhuman effort of will, she dragged her thoughts on to alien subjects, mastering and dominating them, and keeping them away from her woes; she forced herself to be consoled, to occupy herself and give up thinking of gloomy things, in order to get back her healthy complexion.

Above all she did not want to return to Paris and see Olivier Bertin before she was herself again. Realising that she had got too thin, and that the flesh of women of her age must be full to preserve its freshness, she tried to rouse an appetite by walking

in the lanes and neighbouring woods, and though she returned weary and without hunger, she com-

pelled herself to eat largely.

The comte, who was anxious to return, could not understand her determination to remain. Finally, in the face of her unconquerable resistance, he announced that he was going by himself, leaving the comtesse free to return when she felt inclined.

The next day she received the telegram with the

news of Olivier's arrival.

She was seized with a desire to run away, so much did she dread his first glance. She had wanted to wait a week or two longer. In a week's time, with care, it is possible to alter one's face entirely, since the slightest influence can render even young and healthy women unrecognisable from one day to the next. But the idea of appearing before Olivier in the open air, in the full light of the sun and in an August glare, beside Annette's fresh face, horrified her to such a degree that she decided at once not to go to the station and to wait for him in the half-light of the drawing-room.

She had gone up to her room and was thinking. Occasional waves of heat shook the curtains. The song of the crickets filled the air. Never before had she felt so despondent. She no longer suffered from the great crushing grief that had shattered her heart, torn her asunder and prostrated her, before the lifeless body of her old, well-beloved mother. The grief she had thought incurable had died down in a few days to a mere painful remembrance. But now she felt herself swept away and overwhelmed in a deep flood of melancholy into which she had fallen

quite gently and from which she would never escape

again.

She had a longing — an irresistible longing — to cry — and she would not. Each time she felt her eyelids wet, she wiped them briskly, got up, walked about, looked at the park and at the crows winging their slow black flight in the blue sky, over the tall clumps of trees.

And then she passed in front of her mirror, gave herself an appraising glance, removed the trace of a tear by dabbing the corner of her eye with her powder-puff. She looked at the time, wondering

how far he could have got by now.

Like all women overwhelmed by spiritual distress, real or imaginary, she clung to him with an unreasoning love. Was he not all in all to her, more than life itself, all that a person becomes when we love wholeheartedly and when we feel ourselves growing old!

Suddenly she heard the crack of a whip in the distance, ran to the window and saw the phaeton with its two horses coming round the green sward at a brisk trot. Seated beside Annette at the back of the carriage, Olivier waved his handerkerchief on seeing the comtesse, and she replied to his signal by throwing greetings with both hands. Then she went downstairs with beating heart but happy for the moment, throbbing with joy to feel him so near, to be able to speak to him and see him.

They met in the hall before the drawing-room door. He opened his arms towards her with an irresistible impulse, and said in a voice thrilled with sincere

emotion:

"Oh! my poor comtesse, let me embrace you."

She closed her eyes, leaned up close against him and offered him her cheeks. And as he pressed his lips to them, she whispered in his ear: "I love you!"

Then Olivier, still holding her hands in his grasp,

looked at her and said:

"Let me look at this poor sad face."

She felt her knees give beneath her. Then he went on:

"Yes, a little wan; but that's nothing."

To thank him, she stammered the only words that came to her lips:

"Oh, my dear, dear friend!"

But he had turned round and was looking behind him for Annette, who had disappeared. Then abruptly:

"Isn't it strange to see your daughter in mourn-

ing?"

"Why?" asked the comtesse.

He cried out with an extraordinary animation:

"You ask why? Because it is your portrait that I painted of you, my portrait! It is you as I met you long ago at the Duchesse's! You remember that door where you passed beneath my eyes, as a frigate under the cannon of a fort. Great heavens! Just now at the station, when I saw the child standing on the platform, all in black with the aureole of her hair about her face, my pulse stopped. I thought I was going to cry. I tell you it is enough to drive one crazy, when one has known you as I have known you, I who have looked at you more closely and loved you better than anyone, and reproduced you in a picture. Oh, I really thought that you had sent her to the station all alone to give me this surprise.

Great God, and I was surprised! It's enough to drive one crazy, I tell you."

He shouted:

"Annette, Nané."

The girl's voice replied from outside, because she was giving the horses some sugar.

"Hallo! Hallo!"

"Come here."

She ran up.

"Now, stand close to your mother."

She stood there and he compared them. But he repeated mechanically and without conviction: "Yes, it's amazing, amazing," for they were less alike side by side than before they left Paris. The girl had taken on in this black dress a new expression of resplendent youth, whilst the mother had long lost the brilliance of hair and complexion that had dazzled and intoxicated the painter at their first meeting.

Then the comtesse and he went into the drawing-

room. He seemed overjoyed.

"Oh, what a good idea of mine to come here!" he said; then added: "No, it was your husband who had the idea for me. He commissioned me to bring you back. And do you know what I suggest?—No?—Well, I suggest that we should stay here. In this heat Paris is abominable, whilst the country is delightful. Lord! How pleasant it is!"

The fall of evening bathed the park in freshness, made the trees quiver and the earth breathe out imperceptible vapours that cast a light transparent veil over the horizon. The three cows, standing up with lowered heads, munched greedily; and four

peacocks with a great whirring of wings flew up to roost in a cedar beneath the windows of the castle, where they always slept. Dogs barked far away over the country-side, and through the still air of this day's end came the shouts of human voices, phrases hurled across the fields from one spot to another, accompanied by the short, guttural cries of cattle-drivers.

The painter, bare-headed and with shining eyes, drew in deep breaths of air; seeing the comtesse looking at him, he said:

"This is true happiness."

She came up to him: "It does not last."

"Let us seize it when it comes."

She smiled:

"Till now, you did not like the country."

"I like it now, because you are there. I cannot live where you are not. When we are young, we can love from a distance, by letter, by thought, by pure exaltation of spirit — perhaps because we feel life before us, and perhaps too because we have more passion than yearnings of the heart; at my age love has become an invalid's habit, it soothes the soul, which, one wing useless now, cannot fly so readily into the ideal. The heart has no more ecstasies, but only selfish requirements. Then too, I feel I have no time to lose in enjoying what is left to me."

"Oh! Poor old thing!" she said, taking him by

the hand.

He repeated:

"Yes, yes. I am old. Everything shows it — my hair, my changing character, the gloom that comes

upon me: gloom, a thing I never knew till now. If anyone had told me when I was thirty that one day I should suffer an unreasoning melancholy, feel restless, dissatisfied with everything, I should not have believed him. That proves my heart has grown old too."

She replied in a tone of profound conviction:

"As for me, my heart is quite young. It has not changed. Yes, it has got younger perhaps. It was

twenty; it is now only sixteen."

They stayed a long time chatting thus in the open window, in harmony with the soul of the evening, quite close to one another, closer than they had ever been, in that hour of love, twilit like the day.

A servant came in to announce: "Madame la Comtesse is served."

She asked:

"You have told my daughter?"

"Mademoiselle is in the dining-room."

The three of them sat down to table. The shutters were closed, and two large candelabras with six branches lit up Annette's face and made her head look powdered with gold. Bertin, smiling, could not take his eyes from her.

"Heavens! How pretty she is in black!"

He turned towards the comtesse as he praised the girl, as though to thank her for having given him

this delight.

When they returned to the drawing-room, the moon had risen above the trees in the park. Their dark mass looked like a large island, and the country beyond was like a sea hidden beneath the slight mist floating across the surface of the plains.

"Oh, mummy, let us go for a walk," said Annette.

The comtesse agreed. "I am taking Julio."
"Yes, if you like."

They went out. The girl went on ahead, playing with the dog. When they walked along the grass, they could hear the breathing of the cows that had wakened up and, sensing the presence of their enemy, were raising their heads to look around. Further off, beneath the trees, the moon poured between the branches a shower of slender rays; they glided to the earth, bathing the leaves in light and spread over the path in little patches of yellow light. Annette and Julio ran about, seeming in this quiet night air to have the same joyous, untroubled hearts, whose mad joy found expression in gambols.

In the clearings where the streaming moonlight poured as into a well, the girl flitted to and fro like an apparition, and the painter called her back, marvelling at this vision in black with the pure, shining face. Then, when she had gone again he took the comtesse's hand and pressed it and often sought her lips as they went through thicker shadows, as if each time the sight of Annette had rekindled the impatient

longing of his heart.

At length they reached the edge of the plain, at a point where they could just see, here and there in the distance, the clumps of trees belonging to the farms. Through the milky haze bathing the fields the horizon receded to infinity and the gentle living silence of this great luminous warm expanse was full of the inexpressible hope and the indefinable expectation that lend enchantment to a summer's night.

High up in the heavens, a few long thin clouds looked as though they were made of silver scales. And as they stood motionless for a few moments, they could hear a confused perpetual hum of life, a thousand tiny sounds whose harmony at first seemed silence.

In a neighbouring meadow a quail uttered its double cry, and Julio, ears erect, went softly in the direction of the two flute-notes of the bird. Annette followed, treading lightly as he, holding her breath

and stooping low.

"Ah!" said the comtesse, left alone with the painter, "why do moments like this pass so quickly! One can take hold on nothing, keep nothing. We have not even time to taste the good things. They are already over."

Olivier kissed her hand and replied with a smile: "This evening I cannot philosophise. I am living wholly in the present."

She whispered:

"You do not love me as I love you."

"Oh! I do! . . . "
She interrupted him:

"No; you love in me, as you expressed it so well before dinner, a woman who supplies the needs of your heart, a woman who has never hurt you and who has brought a little happiness into your life. I know it, I can tell it. Yes. I have the consciousness, the burning joy of having been kind to you, useful and helpful. You have loved, you still love, all that you find pleasurable in me — my attentions to you, my admiration, my anxiety to please you, my love and the utter surrender I have made you of my inmost being. But it is not I, do you under-

stand? that you love. I can feel that knowledge like a gust of cold air. You love a thousand things in me, my beauty that is fading, my devotion, my reputed wit, the opinion people have of me in the world, and that which I have of you in my heart. But it is not I, I and only I! Can you understand?"

He laughed a friendly little laugh:

"No, I do not exactly understand. This outburst of reproach was very unexpected."

She exclaimed:

"Oh, my God! I wish I could make you understand how I love you. I am trying, you see, and I cannot do it. When I think of you - and I am always thinking of you - I feel in the depth of my body and of my soul an unspeakable exultation at belonging to you, and an irresistible desire to give you more of myself. I should like to sacrifice myself completely: for there is nothing better, when one loves, than to give, always to give, and to give all - one's life, one's thoughts, one's body, all that one has; to feel that one is giving and to be ready to risk all to give yet more. I love you, so utterly that I love suffering for your sake, my anxieties, my torments, my jealousies, and the pain I feel when you seem no longer loving towards me. I love in you someone that I alone have found, a you that is not the you the world sees and knows and admires — a you that is mine, that cannot change, or grow old, or that I cannot love any more, since I can look upon it with eyes that see nothing else than it. But one cannot say these things. There are no words in which to say them."

He repeated again and again very gently:

"Dear, dear, dear Any."

Julio came bounding up; he had not found the quail, which had fallen silent at his approach; and Annette still followed him, all out of breath with running.

"Oh, I can't go any further. I cling to you,

Mr. Artist."

She leant on Olivier's free arm and in this way they walked home beneath the black trees, he walking between the two women. They spoke no more. He went on, possessed by them, enveloped by a sort of aura of femininity in which their touch wrapped him. He did not try to see them, since he had them against him. He even closed his eves the better to feel them. They guided him, led him, and he walked straight ahead, enamoured of them, of the woman on his left as of the woman on his right, without knowing which was on his left and which on his right, which was the mother and which the daughter. Deliberately, with delicate unconscious sensuality, he gave himself up to the stirring of this sensation. He tried even to blend them in his heart, to make no distinction between them in his thoughts, and he lulled his desires in the enchantment of this mingling. Were they not one woman, this mother and daughter so like one another? And did it not seem as though the daughter had come on earth simply to rekindle his old love for the mother?

When he opened his eyes as they entered the castle, he felt that he had just spent the most delightful moments of his life, undergone the rarest, most unanalysable and most complete sensation that

a man could know, intoxicated with a single passion by the charm diffused by two women.

"Oh! what an exquisite evening!" he said, as soon as he found himself between them in the lamplight.

Annette exclaimed:

"I don't feel at all sleepy. I could spend the whole night walking in this lovely weather."

The comtesse looked at the clock:

"Oh! It is half past eleven. We must off to bed, my child."

They separated, each going to his room. Only the girl, who did not want to go to bed, went to sleep

quickly.

The next morning, at the usual time, when the maid had drawn the curtains and opened the shutters, she brought the tea and, looking at her still drowsy mistress, said to her:

"Madam is looking better to-day already."

"You think so?"

"Oh, yes. Madam's face is more restful."

The comtesse, even before looking at herself, knew that it was true. Her heart was light, she did not feel it beating and she felt herself alive. The blood no longer rushed through her veins as it had done the day before, hot and feverish, spreading lassitude and restlessness through her whole body. It filled her with a warm well-being and a happy confidence.

When the maid had gone, she went and looked at herself in the glass. She was a little surprised, for she felt so well that she expected to find herself made several years younger in a single night. Then she realised the childishness of such a hope, and after looking at herself again, she resigned herself to the

discovery that her complexion was merely a little clearer, her eyes less tired and her lips redder than the day before. As her heart was contented, she could not feel sad; and she smiled at the thoughts: "Yes, in a few days I shall be quite well. I have been too severely tried to get better so quickly as all that."

But she stayed long, very long, seated before her toilet-table, where in front of a beautiful cut-crystal mirror were arranged daintily, on a muslin cloth bordered with lace, all the little ivory-handled servants of beauty, bearing her initial surmounted by a coronet. There they were, innumerable, pretty, various, destined to delicate and secret tasks; some of steel, thin and keen-edged, of strange shapes like surgical instruments for operating on childish ailments; others round and soft, made of feathers or down or the pelts of unknown beasts, for applying to the tender skin the caress of sweet-smelling powders and of solid or liquid perfumes.

For a long time she handled them in her skilful fingers, running from lips to temples their touch more gentle than a kiss, correcting tints imperfectly restored, underlining her eyes and attending to her eyelashes. When at length she went downstairs she was almost certain that the first glance he gave her

would not be unfavourable.
"Where is M. Bertin?" she asked of the servant

she met in the hall.

The man replied:

"M. Bertin is in the orchard playing tennis with Mademoiselle."

She heard them in the distance shouting out the score.

One after the other, the deep voice of the painter and the shrill voice of the young girl cried out: fifteen, thirty, forty, 'vantage, deuce, 'vantage, game.

The orchard, where a piece of ground had been levelled for a tennis court, was a large grassy square planted with apple-trees and surrounded by the park, the kitchen garden and the farms dependent on the castle. Along the banks bounding it on three sides, like the defences of an entrenched camp, flowers had been set - long borders of flowers of every sort wild or rare — roses in profusion, pansies, heliotrope, fuchsias, mignonette and a host of others that gave the air a honey-flower flavour, as Bertin said. And bees, whose hives with their domes of straw were ranged along the espalier fence of the kitchen garden, covered this flowery meadow with their bright droning swarms.

Right in the middle of the orchard some appletrees had been cut down to secure the necessary room for the court, and a tarred net stretched across this space divided it into two camps.

On one side, Annette, with her black skirt caught up, and displaying her ankles and half her calves when she jumped to volley a ball, rushed backwards and forwards with shining eyes and flushed cheeks. made weary and breathless by the accurate, faultless

play of her opponent.

He, in white flannel trousers fastened at the waist over a shirt of the same material, with a peaked white cap on his head, and his stomach slightly protruding, waited coolly for the ball, judged its fall precisely, took and returned it without hurrying himself and without running, with that easy, elegant,

eager attention and professional skill he brought to all his sports.

Annette was the first to catch sight of her mother,

and she called out:

"Good morning, mummy. Wait a minute till we have finished this rally."

This momentary distraction was her undoing. The ball passed close to her, swift and low, almost rolling,

touched the ground and went out of play.

Bertin shouted "Game" and the girl in surprise accused him of having taken advantage of her inattention, while Julio, trained to look for and retrieve strayed balls, like partridges fallen in the brushwood, sprang after the one running before him in the grass, seized it gently in his mouth and brought it back, wagging his tail.

The painter now paid his respects to the comtesse, but he was eager to start play again, excited by the contest and pleased to feel himself in good form, and threw only a swift indifferent glance at the face which had been so carefully tended for him. Then he said:

"Will you excuse me, dear comtesse? I am afraid of getting cold and catching a touch of neuralgia."

"Oh, certainly," she answered.

She sat down on a heap of hay cut that morning, to give the players free scope, and watched them,

suddenly a little sad at heart.

Her daughter, always annoyed at losing, became more active, got excited, cried out in exasperation or in triumph, and sprang wildly from one end of the court to the other. And as she jumped, tresses of her hair kept slipping; they came unrolled and then spread over her shoulders. She grasped at them, putting her racket between her knees, and fastened them up again with quick impatient movements, hastily stabbing pins into the mass of her hair.

And Bertin shouted across the space between them

to the comtesse:

"Isn't she pretty like that, and fresh as the day?"

Yes, she was young. She could run about, get hot and red, let her hair come down, risk all, dare all,

for everything made her more beautiful.

Then, when they began eagerly to play again, the comtesse became more and more disconsolate, and thought that Olivier preferred this game of ball, this childlike animation, this pleasure of a young kitten jumping after a paper pellet, to the sweet restfulness of sitting next to her on this hot morning and feeling her warm life against him.

When the distant clock chimed the first stroke of the lunch hour, it felt to her like a deliverance, like the lifting of a weight from her heart. But as she

returned, leaning on his arm, he said to her:

"I have just been enjoying myself like a little urchin. It's frightfully good to be, or to think oneself, young. Yes, yes, that's all there is about it! When you no longer like running about, it's all over."

When they rose from the table the comtesse, who the day before had missed going to the cemetery for the first time, suggested they should go there to-

gether; and they all set forth for the village.

They had to pass through the wood in which flowed a stream called the Rainette, doubtless owing to the little frogs with which it was thronged; then cross part of the open country before reaching the church built in a cluster of houses and overshadowing the

grocer's, the baker's, the butcher's and wineseller's and a few other modest shopkeepers to whom the

peasants came to replenish their stores.

The journey there was silent and thoughtful; the memory of her who was dead oppressed their spirits. At the grave the two women kneeled long and prayed. The comtesse remained motionless with bowed head and a handkerchief to her eyes, for she was afraid of crying and letting the tears run down her cheeks. She prayed, not as she had done hitherto, as if she were evoking her mother's shade, sending a despairing summons beneath the marble of the tomb, until in the paroxysm of her grief she thought she felt that the dead heard her and was listening to her. Merely she murmured ardently the sacred words of the Paternoster and the Ave Maria. That day, she would never have had the strength and tension of spirit necessary for that cruel unanswered converse with all that could remain of her who had gone, near the grave that hid what once had been her body. Other obsessions had invaded her woman's heart, stirred it, bruised and distracted it; and her fervent prayers rose up to heaven full of unuttered supplications. She implored God, the inexorable God who had cast upon the earth all the poor wretches thereof, to take pity on her even as on her He had summoned to Him.

She could not have given words to her request; her apprehensions were still obscure and confused; but she felt she had need of the divine assistance, of a supernatural defence against approaching dangers and inevitable woes.

Annette, her eyes closed, had fallen into a reverie,

after murmuring in her turn a few formal prayers. She did not wish to rise before her mother.

Olivier Bertin watched them, thinking that he had a charming picture in front of him and rather re-

gretting that he might not make a sketch.

As they returned home they began to speak of human existence, and raked gently among the bitter, poetical ideas of a compassionate and hopeless philosophy, which are a frequent subject of conversation among men and women whom life hurts a little or whose hearts meet in the communion of their trouble.

Annette, who was not of an age for these reflections, kept moving away to gather wild flowers at the

edge of the road.

But Olivier was seized with a desire to keep her near him; it got on his nerves to see her continually dashing away, and his eyes never left her. He was annoyed that she took more interest in the colour of the flowers than in the phrases pronounced by him. He felt an indefinable uneasiness that he was not able to hold her captive and dominate her as he dominated her mother. And he wanted to stretch out his hand, take hold of her, keep her by him and forbid her to go away. He felt that she was too active, too young, too indifferent and too free—free as a bird or as a disobedient puppy that will not come to heel, because the spirit of independence runs in its veins, that charming instinct for freedom which voice and whip have not yet mastered.

To attract her, he spoke of gayer things, sometimes he asked her a question and tried to arouse her desire to listen and her woman's curiosity. But it was as

though the capricious wind of the open sky blew in Annette's head that day, as over the waving corn. and carried away her attention, scattering it in space. For she scarcely made the conventional reply expected of her, interjected indifferently between one flight and the next, before she was off again to her flowers. At length he got out of patience, pricked by a childish annoyance; and when she came to ask her mother to carry her first bunch so that she could go and gather another, he caught her by the elbow and grasped her arm so that she could not escape any more. She struggled, laughing, and tugged with all her strength to get away. Then, inspired by a masculine instinct, he used the weapon of the weak; and, being unable to attract her attention, he bought it by playing on her love of pleasure.

"Tell me," he said, "what flower you like best. I

will have you a brooch made."

She hesitated in surprise.

"A brooch?"

"Made of stones of the same colour; of rubies if it is the poppy, of sapphires if it is the cornflower, with a little leaf in emeralds."

Annette's face lit up with that affectionate joy which promises and presents arouse in a woman's face.

"The cornflower," she said; "it is so pretty."

"A cornflower then it shall be. We will go and order it as soon as we are back in Paris."

She ran away no more, attached to him by the thought of the jewel, that she was already trying to imagine and picture to herself. She asked:

"Does it take very long to make, a thing like that?"

He laughed, knowing that he had caught her.

"I don't know. That depends how difficult it is. We will hurry the jewellers up."

Suddenly a tiresome reflection passed through her

mind.

"But I could not wear it, since I am in deep mourning."

He had passed his arm through the young girl's

and pressed her to him.

"Well, then, you shall keep the brooch till the end of your mourning. It won't prevent you from look-

ing at it."

As on the previous evening, he was between them, held close captive between their shoulders, and so that he could see raised to his the blue eyes, dotted with black specks, and so like to one another, he spoke to them in turns, bending his head first towards one, and then towards the other. With the bright sun full upon them, he confused the comtesse less with Annette now; but more and more did he confuse the daughter with the reviving memory of what the mother had been. He longed to embrace them both; the one in order to feel again on her cheek and neck a little of that rose and white freshness he had savoured long ago and which he saw again to-day in miraculous reincarnation; the other because he loved her always, and felt issuing from her the powerful appeal of an abiding habit. He realised at this moment and understood that his desire for her, long somewhat wearied, and his affection for her, had been rekindled by the sight of her resurrected youth.

Annette went off again to gather flowers. Olivier

did not call her back again, as if the touch of her arm and the satisfaction of the pleasure it gave him had soothed him. But he followed her every movement, with the delight we feel in looking at things or persons who capture and intoxicate our glance. When she came back, carrying a bunch, he drew a deeper breath, trying unconsciously to catch something of her, of her breath, of the warmth of her skin — in the air stirred by her running. He looked at her enraptured, as one looks at a dawn or listens to music, with a thrill of pleasure, whenever she stooped down, drew herself up again and lifted both arms together to rearrange her hair. More sharply, from hour to hour, she evoked in him the memory of the past! Her laughs, her pretty ways, her gestures, recalled to his lips the savour of kisses given and received long ago. She made the distant past, that had grown dim in his heart, something like a present dream. She blended periods, dates, the changing states of his emotions; rekindled emotions grown cold; and mingled yesterday with to-morrow, and remembrance with hope, in a heart that did not know what was happening to it.

He probed within his memory and wondered if, in her fullest bloom, the comtesse had had this lithe goat-like charm, this bold, capricious, irresistible charm, like the grace of an animal that runs and leaps. No. She had been fuller-blown and less wild. Passing from girlhood to womanhood in the town, she had never drunk in the air of the fields nor lived among the grass, and she had grown in beauty within the shadow of walls and not in the light of heaven.

When they got back to the castle, the comtesse

began to write letters on her little, low table, in the embrasure of a window. Annette went up to her room, and the painter went out again to walk slowly, cigar in his mouth and hands behind his back, along the winding paths of the park. But he did not go out of sight of the white façade or the pointed roof of the house. As soon as it disappeared behind a clump of trees or tuft of shrubs, he felt a shadow pass over his heart, as when a cloud blots out the sun; and when it reappeared through the latticed greenery, he stopped a few moments to contemplate the two lines of high windows. Then he started off again.

He felt restless, but contented. Contented with

what? With everything.

The air seemed pure, and life seemed good, that day. He felt once again in his body the blitheness of a little boy, a longing to run, to catch in his hand the yellow butterflies that fluttered over the grass like insects suspended at the end of elastic strings. He sang operatic airs. Time and again he repeated Gounod's famous line, "Let me look upon thy face," finding in it a profoundly tender expression that he

had never realised in the same way before.

Suddenly he wondered how it came about that he had altered so quickly. Yesterday in Paris, discontented with everything, disgusted, irritated: to-day, calm and completely satisfied. It was as though a kindly deity had wrought a change in his soul. "The good God," he thought, "ought to have changed my body at the same time and made me a little younger." Suddenly, he saw Julio ferreting in the brushwood. He called him; and when the dog had come and laid beneath his hand its handsome head with its curly

ears, he sat down on the grass to caress it better, said nice things to it, took it on his knees; and, filled with a sudden affection as he fondled it, he kissed it, like a woman whose heart is moved by every little thing.

After dinner, instead of going out as on the day before, they spent the evening at home in the draw-

ing-room.

Suddenly the comtesse said:

"Still, we shall have to be leaving soon."

Olivier protested.

"Oh! do not talk of that yet. When I was not here you did not want to leave Roncières. I come and you think of nothing but getting away."

"But, my dear friend, we can't remain here in-

definitely, the three of us."

"It is not a question of indefinitely, but of a few days. How often have I spent whole weeks with you?"

"Yes, but in different circumstances — at a time

when the house was open to everyone."

Then Annette said in a caressing voice:

"Oh, mummy, just a few more days, two or three. He's teaching me so splendidly to play tennis. I get angry when I lose, and then afterwards I am ever so

glad I am getting better."

That very morning, the comtesse had thought of extending until Sunday her friend's mysterious visit; and now, without knowing why, she wanted to go away. This day which she had hoped would be so enjoyable, had left a deep and inexpressible sadness in her heart, a causeless fear, vague and tenacious as a foreboding.

When she was alone in her room, she tried to discover whence had come this fresh attack of melan-

choly.

Had she undergone one of those imperceptible emotions whose touch has been so transitory that the mind does not remember them, though the more sensitive strings of the heart quiver from them still?

— Perhaps. What then? She could remember clearly certain inadmissible disappointments in the thousand shades of feeling through which she had passed, each moment bringing its own! But they were really too slight to produce this downheartedness. "I am exacting," she thought. "I have no right to torment myself like this."

She opened her window to breathe in the night air, and stayed leaning on her elbows, her eyes fixed upon

the moon.

A slight noise made her stoop her head. Olivier was walking in front of the castle. — "Why did he tell me he was going to his room?" she thought. "Why did not he let me know he was going out again? Why didn't he ask me to come with him? He knows that would have made me so happy. What is he

thinking about?"

This idea that he did not want her on this walk, that he had preferred to go out alone on this beautiful night; alone, cigar in mouth, for she saw the red fiery point; alone, when he could have given her the joy of taking her with him: the idea that he was not constantly in need of her, constantly longing for her, sent a fresh surge of bitterness flooding through her soul.

She was going to close her window so that she

would no longer see him or be tempted to call out to him, when he raised his eyes and caught sight of her.

"Hallo," he cried. "Dreaming at the stars, com-

tesse?"

She answered:

"Yes, and you too, apparently."
"I! Oh! I am just smoking."

She could not resist the desire to ask him:

"Honly wanted to puff a cigar. Besides, I am just coming in."

"Then good night, my dear."

"Good night, comtesse."

She tottered back to her low chair, sat down and wept. And the maid summoned to put her to bed, seeing her red eyes, said sympathetically:

"Ah! Madam will make herself look ugly again

to-morrow."

The comtesse slept badly. She was feverish and disturbed by nightmares. As soon as she woke, and before ringing, she opened the window and drew the curtains herself to look at herself in the glass. Her features were drawn, her eyelids swollen and her complexion yellow. And the sorrow she felt thereat was so great that she felt inclined to say she was ill, to keep to her bed and not show herself until the evening.

Then suddenly the desire to go away came upon her, with irresistible force, to go away at once by the first train, and leave the bright country-side where the irremovable marks of weariness left by sorrow and life were all too visible in the clear light of the fields. In Paris things are seen in the semi-darkness of a room, where even at midday the curtains only let through a soft gleam. There she would become herself again, beautiful with the pallor suitable to that dimmed, discreet light. Then Annette's face when she was playing tennis, passed before her eyes, flushed with an almost artificial brilliance, and so fresh. She understood this strange trouble of her soul. She was not jealous of her daughter's beauty. No; but she realised, she admitted to herself for the first time, that she must never again appear beside her in the sunlight.

She rang, and, before drinking her tea, gave orders for their departure, wrote out some telegrams — even ordering her dinner that evening by wire — made up her accounts for her stay in the country, distributed her last instructions and arranged all in less than an hour, a prey to a feverish and growing impatience.

When she came down, Annette and Olivier, informed of this decision, questioned her with surprise. Then, seeing that she gave no definite reason for this sudden flight, they grumbled a little and showed their dissatisfaction up to the moment of separating in the station yard at Paris.

The comtesse asked, as she gave the painter her

hand:

"Will you come to dinner to-morrow?"

He answered rather moodily:

"Yes, certainly, I will come. I don't mind. It is not nice of you to have done this. The three of us were so happy down there."

As soon as the comtesse was alone with her daughter in the carriage that was taking her home, she felt suddenly quiet and soothed, as if she had just passed through some dreadful crisis. She could breathe better, smiled at the houses, and greeted joyously the whole town, whose familiar details true Parisians seem to carry in their eyes and in their hearts. Every shop she saw recalled the ones that followed it all along the Boulevard; and she could imagine the face of the shopkeeper so often glimpsed behind his glass shop-front. She felt saved! from what? Reassured! why? Confident! of what?

When the carriages stopped beneath the arch of the court-yard gate, she alighted briskly, and fled, as though she were being pursued, into the shade of the staircase, then into the shade of her drawing-room, then into the shade of her bedroom. At last she stood still a few moments, glad to be there, secure, in the dim misty light of Paris, which throws so vague a light on things, leaves as much to be guessed as seen, and where one can display what it is desirable to display, and hide what should be hidden. And the wild memory of the glaring light bathing the country-side was still with her like the memory of a past anguish.

When she came down to dinner, her husband, who had just come in, kissed her affectionately and said

smilingly:

"Ah! I knew friend Bertin would bring you back. It was a clever stroke of mine to send him."

Annette answered gravely, in that peculiar tone she assumed when she joked without laughing.

"Oh! he had a great deal of trouble. Mummy

could not make up her mind."

And the comtesse said nothing. She was a little confused.

The door being shut to visitors, no one came to see them that evening. The next day Mme. de Guilleroy spent all her time in various shops choosing and ordering all that she wanted. Since her vouth, almost since her childhood, she had loved those long fittings in front of the mirrors at the fashionable dressmakers'. As soon as she had entered the building she felt happier in the prospect of all the details of this meticulous rehearsal behind the scenes of Parisian life. She adored the sound made by the skirts of the "young ladies" who ran up when she came in, their smiles, their offers, their questions. And the presiding goddess of the costume, millinery or corset shrine was for her a person of worth, to whom she deferred as an artist whenever she asked for advice on her ideas. Still more, she adored feeling herself touched by the clever hands of the young girls who undressed her and dressed her again, making her pivot gently before her own elegant reflection. The slight thrill that their delicate fingers sent through her body, her neck, or her hair, was one of the rarest and most delightful little sensual pleasures in her fashionable woman's life.

That day, however, it was with a certain anxiety that she prepared to pass, disrobed and bare-headed,

before all those truthful mirrors. Her first visit to the milliner's reassured her. The three hats she chose suited her admirably, she could not deny it, and when the woman said to her with conviction: "Oh, Madame la Comtesse, fair women ought never to discard their mourning," she went away quite happy and entered the other outfitters' full of confidence.

Then she found at home a note from the Duchesse, who had come to see her, announcing that she would come again in the evening. Then she wrote some letters. Then she dreamed awhile, surprised that this mere change of surroundings should have driven into a past that seemed already far away the dreadful grief which had prostrated her. She could not even convince herself that her return from Roncières dated only from the previous day, so greatly had her state of mind altered since her return to Paris, as though this little move had scarred over her wounds.

When Bertin arrived for dinner, he cried out on catching sight of her:

"You are dazzling, this evening."

The exclamation sent through her body a warm

tide of happiness.

When they rose from the table, the comte, who had a passion for billiards, proposed to Bertin that they should have a game, and the two women accompanied them into the billiard-room, where the coffee was served.

They were still playing when the Duchesse was announced and they all went back to the drawing-room. Mme. de Corbelle and her husband appeared at the same time, their voices laden with emotion.

For a few minutes, the conversation was carried on in so dismal a tone that it looked as though everyone was going to weep. But gradually, after the questionings and the effusions of sympathy, another current of ideas came along; their voices suddenly rang clear; and they began to talk naturally, as if the cloud of sadness that just now had cast its shadow over all these people had suddenly dispersed.

Then Bertin got up, took Annette by the hand, and led her beneath her mother's portrait in the gleam of

the reflecting lamp, and asked:

"Isn't it amazing?"

The Duchesse was so surprised that she seemed

quite beside herself, and kept on repeating:

"Well, I never! Is it possible? Well, I never! Is it possible? — It's a reincarnation. To think I never saw it when I came in! Oh, my darling Any, how I can see you again, I who knew you so well then, in your first mourning, no, your second, for you had already lost your father. Oh! Annette in black like that! It's her mother returned to earth. — What a miracle! But for that portrait one would never have noticed it! — Your daughter is still very like you in the flesh, but infinitely more so on this canvas."

Musadieu put in an appearance, having heard of Mme. de Guilleroy's return and anxious to be among the first to offer her "the homage of his profound

sympathy."

He broke off his compliments on seeing the young girl standing by the picture, enveloped in the same brilliant light, and looking like the living sister of the painting.

He exclaimed:

"Ah! Now that's one of the most extraordinary things I have seen."

And the Corbelles, whose convictions always followed established opinion, marvelled in their turn with a more modified enthusiasm.

The comtesse felt her heart contract; it contracted slowly, slowly, as though the astonished cries breaking from all these people had crushed it and hurt her. She said nothing and looked at her daughter standing beside her portrait, and all her nerves seemed suddenly on edge. She wanted to cry out: "Be quiet about it. I know quite well she is like me."

To the end of the evening she remained despondent, losing again the confidence she had recovered the day before.

Bertin was chatting to her, when the Marquis de Farandal was announced. Seeing him come in and approach the mistress of the house, the painter got up, slipped behind his chair, murmuring: "Ah! now here's this great idiot," then made a detour to the door and went out.

The comtesse received the new-comer's respects and then looked about for Olivier to resume their conversation, which interested her. Not seeing him, she asked:

"What! Has the great man gone?"

Her husband answered:

"I think so, my dear. I just saw him taking French leave."

She was surprised, and thoughtful for a few moments, and then began to talk to the Marquis.

Her friends left early out of politeness, for she had

only half-opened her doors to them, so soon after her sorrow.

Then, when she found herself lying in bed, all the anxieties that had tormented her in the country came back. They took clearer shape; she felt them

more keenly. She felt old.

That evening, for the first time, she had realised that in her own drawing-room where hitherto she alone had been admired, complimented, made much of, loved, another, her daughter, was taking her place. She had realised it suddenly, as she saw the tide of homage turned towards Annette. In that domain which is a pretty woman's house, in that domain where she brooks no overshadowing, from which she removes with tactful and laborious care all formidable comparison, where she lets her equals penetrate only in order to try and make them her vassals, she saw that her daughter was going to reign supreme. How queer it had been, that contraction of her heart when all eyes turned towards Annette standing by the picture with Bertin holding her by the hand! She had felt suddenly extinguished, dispossessed, dethroned. Everyone was looking at Annette; no one turned towards her any more! She was so accustomed to hear compliments and flattery every time her portrait was admired, she was so certain of those eulogies, to which she no longer paid any attention, but by which her vanity was none the less thrilled, that this abandonment, this unlooked-for desertion, this transference of admiration to her daughter, had shaken and surprised and overwhelmed her more than any other rivalry in any other circumstances could have done.

But since she was dowered with one of those natures that in every crisis, after the first moment of prostration, react, struggle and find consoling arguments, she thought that once her darling girl was married and they had given up living together, she would no longer have to bear with this ceaseless comparison that was beginning to be too painful to endure before her lover's eyes.

But the shock had been very great. She was

feverish and hardly slept.

In the morning she woke up tired and aching. And then an irresistible desire rose in her heart to be comforted and helped, to ask the assistance of someone who could cure her of all her pain, of all her miseries moral and physical.

She felt indeed so unwell, so weak, that it occurred to her to send for her doctor. Perhaps she was going to fall seriously ill; for it was unnatural — this continual transition in the course of a few hours between successive phases of suffering and relief. So she sent him a wire and waited.

He arrived about eleven. He was one of those grave fashionable doctors whose competence is guaranteed by decorations and titles, and whose knowledge of society is at least equal to their technical knowledge, and who possess above all for feminine ailments, skilful words that are more efficacious than remedies.

He came in, paid his respects, then looked at his

patient and smiled.

"Come; this is nothing serious. With eyes like yours, no one is ever ill."

She was immediately thankful for this start and

told him all about her attacks of weariness and nervous exhaustion, her melancholia, and finally, and without emphasising it, her disturbing appearance. After listening to her attentively without inquiring about anything else than her appetite, as though he knew quite well the secret nature of this feminine malady, he sounded her, examined her, tapped her shoulders with his finger-tips and felt the weight of her arms. No doubt he had divined her thoughts and, with the delicacy of a practitioner who sees behind every visit, realised that she was consulting him for her beauty much more than for her health. At last he said:

"Yes, we have got a little anæmia, nerves a little out of order. That is nothing surprising since you have just suffered a great sorrow. I am going to write you a little prescription which will put all that right. But above all you must eat strengthening things, take plenty of gravy and don't drink water: drink beer. I will tell you of an excellent brand. Don't tire yourself by staying up too late, but walk as much as you can. Sleep a lot and put on a little flesh. That is all the advice I can give you, dear lady and lovely patient."

She had listened to him with passionate attention, trying to catch the inner meaning of his words.

She caught at his last expression:

"Yes, I have got thin. I was a little too stout at one time, and I have perhaps lost strength by dieting myself."

"Beyond doubt. It does not do any harm to keep thin, when you have always been thin; but when you get thin on principle, it is always at the expense of something else. Fortunately that is soon set

right. Good-bye, madam."

She felt better already, and more lively. And she insisted on the beer he had mentioned being bought for her in time for lunch; at the main shop, so that it should be fresher.

She was just leaving the table, when Bertin was

brought in.

"It is I again," he said, "always I. I have come to ask you, are you doing anything just now?"

"No, nothing; why?"
"And Annette?"

"Nothing either."

"Then can you come round to me about four?"

"Yes; what for?"

"I am sketching the face for the Rêverie I spoke to you about, and asked if your daughter could pose for me a few moments. I should be very much obliged if I could have just an hour to-day. Will you let her?"

The comtesse hesitated; for no reason she could discover, she was vexed. However, she answered:

"Of course, my dear. We will be at your house at four o'clock."

"Thank you. You are kindness itself."

And he departed to prepare his canvas and study his subject so that he would not tire his model.

Then the comtesse went out alone on foot to complete her purchases. She went down into the great central streets, then slowly climbed the Boulevard Malesherbes again. She felt her legs giving way beneath her. As she passed Saint Augustin, she was seized with a desire to enter the church and rest.

She pushed open the padded door, gave a sigh of relief as she breathed the cool air of the huge nave,

and, taking a chair, sat down.

She was religious in the same way as are many Parisian women. She believed unquestioningly in God; for she would not admit the existence of the universe without the existence of a Creator. But associating, like everyone else, the attributes of Divinity with the nature of the created matter before her eyes, she more or less personified her Eternal Being according to her knowledge of His work, without having about it any very precise ideas as to what could be the real nature of this mysterious Artificer.

She believed in Him firmly, theoretically adored Him and felt a certain very vague fear of Him. For she was frankly unaware of His will or intentions, having only a very limited confidence in the priests, all of whom she believed to be the sons of refractory peasants in the army. Her father, a Parisian bourgeois, had imposed upon her no principle of devotion, and until her marriage she had been an indifferent church-goer. Then, her new position regulating her apparent obligations towards the Church more strictly, she had conformed punctiliously to this light servitude.

She was the Lady Patroness of numerous orphanages and much in the public eye. She never missed the one o'clock Mass on Sundays. She gave her alms on her own behalf in person, and those on behalf of society in general through the intermediary of a

priest, curate of her parish.

She had often prayed out of duty, as a soldier mounts guard before the general's door. Sometimes

she had prayed because her heart was heavy: above all when she was afraid Olivier was leaving her. Without confiding to Heaven the reason for her supplication, and behaving towards God with the same naïve hypocrisy as towards a husband, she asked Him to help her. On her father's death, long ago, and then again quite recently on the death of her mother, she had given way to violent outbursts of religious fervour, passionate entreaties and ardent yearnings towards Him who watches over us and comforts us.

And now to-day, in this church she had just entered by chance, she felt suddenly a deep longing to pray, to pray not for anyone or anything, but for herself, only herself, as she had done the other day over her mother's grave. She must have help from somewhere; and she now summoned God as that morning she had summoned the doctor.

She remained long on her knees, in the silence of the church, broken now and then by the sound of steps. Then suddenly, as if a clock had struck in her heart, she remembered, started on seeing that it was on the stroke of four and hurried away to take her daughter, whom Olivier must be expecting al-

ready.

They found the artist in his studio, studying the pose of his *Rêverie* on the canvas. He wanted to reproduce exactly what he had seen in Monceau Park, while walking with Annette: a poor girl, dreaming, an open book upon her knees. He had hesitated for a long time whether he should make her plain or pretty. Plain, she would have more character, would evoke more thought and more feeling, and

would contain more philosophy. Pretty, she would be more attractive, radiate a greater charm and

please better.

The desire to make a study of his young friend decided him. The Dreamer should be pretty, and then she would be able, one day or another, to realise her poetic dream; whilst the plain girl would remain condemned to a dream without end and without hope.

As soon as the two women came in, Olivier rubbed

his hands together and said:

"Well, Mademoiselle Nané, so we are going to

work together."

The comtesse seemed anxious. She sat down in an arm-chair and watched Olivier placing a garden chair made of hollow iron bars in the desired light. Next he opened his bookcase to look for a book, then after a moment's hesitation:

"What does your daughter read?"

"Oh, anything you like. Give her a volume of Victor Hugo."

"La Légende des Siècles?"
"That will do very well."

Then he continued:

"Now, my child, seat yourself there and take hold of this volume of poetry. Look for page . . . page 336, where you will find a piece called *Les Pauvres Gens*. Drink it in, as one drinks the best wines, gently, word by word, and let it go to your head, let it move you. Listen to what your heart says to you. Then close the book, raise your eyes, think and dream. . . . I am just going to make my tools ready."

He went into a corner to scrape his palette. But,

as he squeezed over the thin disk the twisting, slender snakes of paint from their leaden tubes, he kept on turning round to look at the girl absorbed in

her reading.

His heart contracted, his fingers trembled, he no longer knew what he was doing, and confused the colours as he mixed the little heaps of paint. For suddenly he felt an irresistible thrill of passion again, as he looked at this vision, this resurrection, appearing, after a lapse of twelve years, in this very same room.

Now she had finished reading, and was gazing in front of her. Coming nearer, he saw in her eyes two bright drops that fell and ran down her cheeks. Then he started, with one of those violent shocks that drive a man out of his wits, and murmured, turning towards the comtesse:

"Heavens! How beautiful she is!"

But he stopped in amazement at the sight of Mme. de Guilleroy's livid and contorted face.

With wide-open eyes, full of a kind of terror, she was looking at them, him and her daughter. He went up to her, seized with anxiety, and asked:

"What is the matter?"

"I want to speak to you."

She got up and said hurriedly to Annette:

"Wait a minute, my child; I have a word to say to M. Bertin."

Then she passed quickly into the little drawingroom next door where he often made his visitors wait. He followed her, confused, uncomprehending. As soon as they were alone she grasped both his hands and stammered:

"Olivier, Olivier, please, don't make her pose any longer."

Mystified, he murmured:

"But why?"

She answered, pouring out her words:

"Why? Why? He asks why? Don't you realise why? Oh! I ought to have guessed it sooner; but I have only just found it out this moment. . . . I can say nothing now . . . nothing. . . . Go and fetch my daughter. Tell her I am unwell. Get me a cab, and come and ask after me in an hour. I will receive you alone."

"But tell me, what is the matter?"

She seemed on the point of having a nervous break-down.

"Leave me alone. I don't want to speak here. Go

and fetch my daughter and call a cab."

He had to obey and returned to the studio. Annette, all unsuspecting, had started to read again, her heart filled with sadness by the romantic, pitiful story. Olivier said to her:

"Your mother is unwell. She almost collapsed when she got into the little drawing-room. Go and

join her. I am going to get some ether."

He went out and ran to fetch a flask from his room,

then returned.

He found them in tears in one another's arms. Annette, brought near tears by the *Pauvres Gens*, was giving way to her emotion, and the comtesse found a little relief in mingling her pain with that tender sorrow and blending her tears with her daughter's.

He waited awhile, looking at them, not daring to

speak and oppressed himself by an incomprehensible grief.

At last he said:

"Well! Are you better?" The comtesse answered:

"Yes, a little. It is nothing much. You have sent for a carriage?"

"Yes, it will be here in a moment."

"Thank you, my friend. It is nothing. I have suffered too much lately."

A moment later a servant announced:

"The carriage is here!"

And Bertin, full of a secret distress, supported to the door his pale and still swooning friend, whose heart he could feel beating beneath her corsage.

When he was alone, he asked himself: "But what is the matter with her? Why this collapse?" And he began to look for reasons, wandering all round the truth, unable to make up his mind to discover it. At last, he came near it: "Surely," he said to himself, "it can't be that she believes I'm making love to her daughter? No, that would be too much." With loval and ingenious arguments he combated this imagined conviction, and became indignant that she could have for one moment attached to this healthy. almost paternal affection any slightest suspicion of love-making. He gradually became annoyed with the comtesse, furious that she should dare to think him guilty of such infamous conduct, of such unmitigated vileness. And he swore that when he replied to her charges in a few moments he would express his revolt thereat in no measured terms.

He left very shortly to go to her house, impatient

to give his explanation. All the way he prepared, with a growing irritation, the reasonings and the phrases that were to justify him and avenge him for such a suspicion.

He found her on her sofa, and her face bore the

marks of suffering.

"Well," he said to her in a dry tone, "explain, my darling, the strange scene you made just now."

She answered in a broken voice:

"What! don't you understand yet?"

"No! I confess I don't."

"Come, Olivier, look well into your heart."

"In my heart?"

"Yes, into the bottom of your heart."

"I don't understand. Explain yourself more

clearly."

"Look well into the bottom of your heart and see whether you do not find there something fatal for you and for me."

"I tell you I don't understand. I suppose there is something in your imagination. But in my conscience I can find nothing."

"I am not speaking of your conscience. I am

speaking of your heart."

"I cannot guess riddles. I beg of you to be more

explicit."

Then she slowly raised her hands, and took and held those of the painter. Then, as if each word tore her heart asunder:

"Take care, my friend. You are going to fall in

love with my daughter."

He took back his hands brusquely, and with the eagerness of an innocent man protesting against a

shameful accusation, with vehement gestures and increasing excitement, he defended himself by accusing her in his turn for entertaining such a suspicion.

She let him talk for a long time, obstinately incredulous, certain of what she had said. Then she replied:

"But I don't suspect you, my friend. You do not know, as this morning I did not know, what is taking place within you. You behave as though I were accusing you of having wanted to seduce Annette. Oh, no! No! I know how loyal you are and how worthy of all esteem and all confidence. Only I beg and beseech you to look into the bottom of your heart, whether the affection that, in spite of yourself, you are beginning to feel for my daughter, is not rather different from mere friendship."

He got angry, and, becoming more excited, began to plead his loyalty all over again as he had done to

himself in the street, coming along.

She waited until he had made an end of his phrases; then, without anger, unshaken in her conviction, and

terribly pale, she murmured:

"Olivier, I know quite well all that you are telling me, and I am convinced of it as you are. But I am sure I am not deceived. Listen, think well and understand. My daughter is too much like me, she is too entirely all that I was in the days when you began to love me, for you not to begin to love her too."

"You dare then," he shouted, "to throw an accusation like this in my face on a mere supposition and on a futile argument of this sort: he loves me, my daughter is like me — therefore he will love her."

But, seeing the comtesse's face become more and

more drawn, he continued in a gentler tone:

"Come, my dear Any, it is precisely because I find you again in her, that I like this little girl so much. It is you and you alone that I love when I look at her."

"Yes, and it is precisely that which begins to hurt me so much and which I so greatly dread. You have not unravelled your feelings yet. In a little while

you will no longer deceive yourself."

"Any, you are going mad." "Shall I prove it to you?"

"Yes."

"For three years you did not come to Roncières although I begged you to come. But you came flying down when it was suggested you should come and fetch us."

"Oh! really! Do you blame me for not leaving you alone there, when I knew you were ill, after

your mother's death?"

"Very well. I will not insist. But here again: the desire to see Annette again is so strong in you that you could not let to-day pass without asking me to bring her to your house under the pretext of a sitting."

"And you imagine it was not you I wanted to

"You are arguing now against yourself, you are trying to convince yourself; but you do not deceive me. Listen again. Why did you leave so suddenly that evening the day before yesterday, when the Marquis de Farandal called? Do you know?"

He hesitated, surprised, upset and unarmed by

this remark. Then, slowly:

"I . . . I don't really know. . . . I was tired

. . . and then, to be candid, that fool gets on my nerves."

"Since when?"

"Always."

"I beg your pardon: I have heard you sing his praises. You used to like him at one time. Be quite frank, Olivier."

He thought a few moments. Then, choosing his

words with difficulty:

"Yes, it is possible that the great affection I have for you makes me love all that is yours so dearly that it changes my opinion of this idiot, whom I don't mind meeting now and again, but whom I should be displeased to see at your house every day."

"My daughter's house will not be mine. But that is enough. I know the loyalty of your heart. I know that you will think a great deal about what I have just told you. When you have thought about it, you will realise that I have pointed out to you a great danger, while there is still time to escape it. And you will take care. Let us talk of something else, shall we?"

He felt ill at ease, and did not insist. He no longer knew what to think, needing, in truth, to reflect. And he went away after a quarter of an hour's

indifferent conversation.

LIVIER walked slowly home, as disturbed as if he had just learnt a shameful family secret. He tried to probe his heart, to see clearly within himself, and read those intimate pages of the inner book that seem stuck to one another and can only be turned at times by a stranger's separating finger. Certainly he did not think himself in love with Annette! The comtesse, whose overshadowing jealousy never relaxed its vigilance, had foreseen from afar the peril, and had cried out upon it before it yet existed. But would this exist to-morrow, the day after to-morrow, in a month's time? This was the frank question which he tried to answer frankly. Certainly the child awoke his instincts of affection, but those instincts are so many in a man that the dangerous ones must not be confused with those that are harmless. For instance, he adored animals, particularly cats, and could not see their silky fur without being seized by an irresistible sensual desire to stroke their soft wavy backs and kiss their hair, charged with electricity. The attraction that drew him towards the girl was rather like those obscure and innocent desires that form part of the unceasing and ever restless vibrations of the human nerves. His eyes as an artist and as a man were captivated by her freshness, by that flowering of bright and beautiful life, by that vigour of youth rioting in her. And

his heart, full of memories of his long relationship with the comtesse, had found in the extraordinary likeness of Annette to her mother, a reviving of old emotions, of emotions that had been asleep since the first days of his love; and had perhaps thrilled a little to the sensation of an awakening. An awakening? Yes! That was it. This idea gave him light. He felt as though he had wakened up after years of slumber. If he had loved the child without suspecting it, he would have felt in her presence that rejuvenation of the whole being that makes a man to be born again when the flame of new desire is kindled in him. No: this child had only blown on the embers of the old fire. It was always her mother he loved. a little more than before no doubt because of her daughter, of that renewal of herself. And he found general ground of support for this conclusion in the following piece of sophistry: "A man only loves once. The heart may often be stirred at the sight of another being, for each exercises on each attractions and repulsions. All these influences give birth to friendship, caprices, desires of possession, violent and transitory passions but not to true love. That this love may exist, it is necessary that the two beings be so born the one for the other, be attached to one another in so many ways, by so many identical tastes and so many affinities in body, mind and character, and that they feel themselves bound together by so many things of every kind, that all these form a group of bonds to unite them. In fine, what we love is not so much Mme. X or M. Z; it is a woman or a man, a nameless creature sprung from Nature that is Woman writ large — a creature with organs, a shape,

a heart, a mind and a general fashion of being which attract like a magnet our organs, our eyes, our lips, our heart, our brain, all our appetites, sensual and spiritual. It is a type we love — the union, that is, in a single person, of all those human qualities that attract us when we find them isolated in others."

For him, the Comtesse de Guillerov had been this type; and the length of their relationship, of which he was not weary, proved it to him beyond doubt. Now physically Annette so much resembled what her mother had been as to create a positive illusion; so that there was nothing remarkable in that his man's heart allowed itself to be a little surprised, though not carried away. He had adored a woman! Another woman was born of her, almost exactly like her. He could not in truth deny having transferred to the second some slight affection, which was a shadow of the passionate love he had for the first. There was nothing wrong in that. There was no danger there. Only his gaze and his memory allowed themselves to yield to the illusion of this seeming resurrection. But his feelings never strayed. He had never felt for the girl the slightest urging of desire.

Still the comtesse reproached him with being jealous of the Marquis. Was it true? He made another rigorous examination into his conscience and discovered that he really was slightly jealous of him. After all, what was there to be surprised at in that? Is not one jealous at every moment of men who make love to any woman? In the street, in a restaurant, at the theatre, does not one feel slightly hostile towards the gentleman who passes by or comes in with a pretty girl on his arm? Every man who possesses a woman is a rival. He is a male satisfied, a conqueror envied by the other males. Then too, without entering into these psychological considerations, if it was normal that he should take a somewhat deeper interest in Annette on account of his affection for her mother, was it not natural that he should feel the birth of a certain animal dislike for her future husband? He would conquer this ugly sentiment without trouble.

In his heart of hearts, however, there still remained a bitterness of discontent with himself and with the comtesse. Would not their everyday relations be hampered by the suspicion he would feel in her? Ought he not to keep watch, with a scrupulous and wearying attention, over all his words, acts, looks, over the least detail of his behaviour towards the young girl? For all that he did or said would seem suspicious in the mother's eyes. He reached home in a bad temper, and began to smoke cigarettes, with the eagerness of a harassed man who uses ten matches to get a light. He tried vainly to work. Hand and eve and brain seemed to have lost the knack of painting, as if they had forgotten, as if they had never known and practised that profession. He had taken up a small half-finished canvas that he wanted to finish: a street corner with a blind man singing. And he looked at it with an unconquerable indifference, and with such an utter incapacity to go on with it that he sat down before it palette in hand and forgot all about it, while continuing to stare at it fixedly and absent-mindedly.

Then suddenly he began to feel the gnawing of an intolerable, feverish impatience with the dragging

hours and the interminable minutes. Since he could not work, what was he to do until he dined at the club? The very thought of the street tired him beforehand, filled him with disgust for the pavements, the passers-by and the vehicles and shops: and the idea of paying calls that day — a call on no matter whom — roused in him an instantaneous loathing for all the people he knew.

What should he do then? Should he walk up and down in his studio to see the hand moved some few seconds farther on each time he turned towards the clock? Oh! He knew those journeys from the door to the chest covered with trinkets. In moments of energy or excitement, of activity or of ready and fertile execution, these walks backwards and forwards across the large room, enlivened, animated and warmed by his work, were a delightful recreation. But in moments of nausea and failing inspiration, in those unhappy moments when nothing seemed worth effort or movement, it was the loathsome perambulation of a prisoner in his cell. If only he could have slept, just an hour, on his divan! But no, he would not sleep; he would merely work himself up until he trembled with exasperation. Whence this sudden attack of melancholia? He thought: "I am becoming damnably nervy to get into such a state for a trifling cause."

Then he thought of taking up a book. The Légende des Siècles had remained on the iron chair where Annette had placed it. He opened, and read two pages of verse and failed to understand them. He understood them no more than if it had been written in a foreign language. He pulled himself together

and started again only to discover that he really did not get at the meaning. "Come," he said to himself, "it seems that I'm wandering." But a sudden inspiration set his mind at rest with regard to the two hours that had to be idled away before dinner. He had a bath prepared and lay stretched out there, soothed and relieved by the warm water until his valet came bringing his clothes and woke him up from his drowsiness. Then he went to the club, where his usual companions had foregathered. He was received with open arms and exclamations, for he had not been seen for some days.

"I have just come back from the country," he

said.

All these men, with the exception of Maldant, the landscape-painter, professed a profound contempt for the country. Rocdiane and Landa used to go and shoot, it is true; but the only pleasure they tasted in the plains and woods was that of watching pheasants, quails or partridges fall to their guns like so many bundles of feathers, or of seeing little paralysed rabbits turn five or six somersaults in succession, at every jump displaying the patch of white hairs in their tail. Apart from these autumnal and winter sports, they thought the country deadly. Rocdiane used to say: "I prefer sweet woman to sweet peas."

Dinner was what it always was — noisy and hilarious, enlivened by discussions from which nothing original emerged. Bertin talked a great deal to cheer himself up. They found him amusing; but as soon as he had drunk his coffee, and played sixty up at billiards with Liverdy the banker, he went out, wandered from the Madeleine to the Rue Taitbout

and passed three times in front of the Vaudeville, wondering whether he should go in. He nearly took a cab to the Hippodrome, changed his mind and went in the direction of the Nouveau-Cirque, then suddenly wheeled half round, without reason, plan or definite motive, and went up the Boulevard Malesherbes. He slackened his pace as he drew near the Comtesse de Guilleroy's house. "She will think it a little strange of me to come and see her this evening," he thought. But he reassured himself with the reflection that there was nothing unusual in his coming a second time to ask after her.

She was alone with Annette, in the little back drawing-room, and still working at her coverlet for the poor.

On seeing him come in, she said simply:

"Oh! So it is you, my dear?"

"Yes: I was anxious and wanted to see you. How are you?"

"Pretty well, thank you. . . . "

She waited a few seconds, then added significantly: "And you?"

He laughed light-heartedly and answered:

"I! Oh! Very well indeed. Your fears were entirely unfounded."

She raised her eyes and stopped knitting, casting on him a lingering eager look of mingled prayer and doubt.

"It is quite true," he said.

"All the better," she answered, with a rather forced smile.

He sat down, and for the first time in that house an unconquerable uneasiness came upon him, a kind

of paralysis of thought even more complete than that which had seized him earlier in the day, before his canvas.

The comtesse said to her daughter:

"You can go on, my child; he doesn't mind it." He asked:

"What was she doing?"

"She was practising a pretty little piece on the piano." Annette got up to go to the piano. He followed her with his eyes, as he always did, unconsciously, and thought how pretty she was. Then he felt her mother looking at him and quickly turned his head, as though he had been looking for something in the dark corner of the drawing-room.

The comtesse took up from her work-table a little gold box — a present from him — opened it and

offered him the cigarettes.

"Please smoke, my dear; you know I like it when

we are alone here."

He obeyed and the piano started to play. It was a piece in the old-fashioned style, light and graceful, one of those pieces that seemed to have been inspired in the composer by very calm moonlight in the spring.

Olivier asked:

"Who wrote it?"

The comtesse replied:

"Schumann. It is charming and very little known."

He felt a growing desire to look at Annette and did not dare to do so. He only needed to make quite a little movement, a little movement of the neck; for he could see out of the corner of his eye the two

fiery patches made by the candles lighting up the score. But he could imagine so well, and read so clearly, the watchful attention of the comtesse that he stayed motionless, his eyes fixed on a spot above his head, interested apparently in the grey thread of tobacco smoke.

Mme. de Guilleroy murmured:

"Is that all you have to say to me?"

He smiled.

"You must not be vexed with me. You know that music hypnotises me, swallows up my thoughts. I'll talk in a moment."

"Ah!" she said, "I had practised something for you, before my mother's death. I have never played it to you. I'll play it in a moment when the child has finished. You shall see how strange it is!"

She had a real talent, and a subtle understanding of the emotion that moves in sounds. It was in fact one of her surest ways of working upon the painter's

susceptibilities.

As soon as Annette had finished Schumann's rustic symphony, the comtesse got up and took her place. And a curious melody woke under her fingers, a melody whose every phrase seemed a complaint—various, changing, manifold complaints broken by a single note ceaselessly recurring, dropping in the middle of the air, cutting them, dividing and breaking them up like an incessant, monotonous, haunting cry, the call of an obsession that will not be silenced.

But Olivier was looking at Annette, who had just sat down opposite him, and he heard nothing, understood nothing. He looked at her without thinking, taking his fill of the sight of her as of something good to which he had been accustomed and which had just been taken from him — drinking it in heartily as a thirsty man drinks water.

"Well?" said the comtesse, "is it not charming?" He woke up and cried:

"Admirable! Superb! Whom is it by?"

"Don't you know it?"

"No."

"Come, you must know it?"

"No, I don't."

"It's by Schubert."

With an air of profound conviction he said:

"That does not surprise me at all. It's superb. I wish you would play it again: it would give me

the greatest pleasure."

She started again. And he turned his head and began to look at Annette again. But he listened to the music too, so that he could taste two pleasures at once.

Then, when Mme. de Guilleroy came and sat down again, he merely obeyed man's natural duplicity and no longer let his eyes rest on the fair profile of the young girl who sat opposite her mother knitting, on

the other side of the lamp.

But if he did not see her, he savoured the charm of her presence, as one feels the nearness of a warm hearth. And he was tormented by the desire to dart an occasional rapid glance at her, turned immediately on the comtesse — like a schoolboy peeping out of the window as soon as the master's back is turned.

He went away early; for his conversation was as

paralysed as his brain. And his persistent silence

might be misinterpreted.

Once in the street, he was seized by a longing to wander about. Any music that he had heard ran in his head long after and beguiled him into daydreams that seemed the imagined and more detailed continuation of the melodies. The sound of the notes came back to him, intermittent and transitory, bringing isolated bars, feeble and distant like an echo. Then it was silent, as if to let his mind give a meaning to the motif and journey in search of some harmonious and tender ideal. He turned to the left towards the exterior Boulevard, and, catching sight of the fairy lights in Monceau Park, entered the central path that circled under the electric moons. A keeper was strolling slowly along; from time to time a belated cab passed by, a man was sitting reading a paper on a bench bathed in a brilliant blue light, at the foot of the bronze column supporting a gleaming globe. Other lights on the lawns and in the midst of the trees, spread among the leaves and over the grass their cold, powerful glare, and animated this great town garden with a pallid life.

Bertin, his hands behind his back, walked along the path; and he remembered his stroll with Annette in this same park, when he had recognised on her lips

her mother's voice.

He dropped on to a bench; and as he breathed in the air exhaled by the well-watered lawns, he fell a prey to all those passionate expectations which make of young men's hearts the incoherent outline of an unending love story. Long ago he had known such evenings — evenings of errant fancy, when he let his imagination wander among fictitious adventures; and he was surprised at this return of sensations

that were no longer of his age.

But like the obstinate note in Schubert's melody, the thought of Annette, the vision of her face bent down under the lamp, and the comtesse's strange suspicions, kept on recurring to him. In spite of himself he continued to trouble his heart with this question, and probe the impenetrable depths, where human feelings germinate before their birth. This unremitting search disturbed him; this constant pre-occupation with the young girl seemed to open before his soul a path of tender reveries. He could no longer drive her from his memory. He bore within him a sort of evocation of her being, as in other days when the comtesse had left him he used to feel still the strange sense of her presence in the walls of his studio.

Suddenly, vexed to be thus dominated by a memory, he murmured as he got up: "It's stupid of Any to have said that to me. She'll make me think of the child now."

He went home, anxious about himself. When he got into bed, he felt that he would not sleep; for a fever ran in his veins, and the leaven of a dream was fermenting in his heart. Dreading a sleepless night, one of those exhausting nights of sleeplessness born of mental agitation, he decided to try and take up a book. How often had a short spell of reading been a narcotic to him! So he got up and went into his library to choose a well-written and sleep-bringing book. But his mind, fully awake in spite of him and greedy of any emotion, searched upon the shelves

for the name of a writer compatible with his excited and expectant state. Balzac, whom he adored, left him cold; he disdained Hugo, despised Lamartine, who none the less always moved him, and fell greedily upon Musset, the poet of all young people. He seized a volume and took it with him to turn over

the pages with haphazard fingers.

When he got into bed again he began to drink in, with a drunkard's thirst, those smooth verses of the inspired poet, who sang birdlike of the dawn of life, and, having breath only for the morning, fell silent before the glaring light of full-blown day — those verses of a poet who was above all a man intoxicated with life, and working off his intoxication in wild and artless outbursts of love, echo of every young heart maddened with desire.

Never before had Bertin realised thus the physical charm of these poems that stir the senses and rouse the intellect scarcely at all. Gazing on these throbbing verses, he felt within him the soul of a man of twenty, buoyed up with hopes; and he read through almost the whole volume with the inebriation of vouth. Three o'clock struck, and he realised with a start that he had not yet been asleep. He got up to close his open window and put the book on the table in the middle of the room. But the contact of the chilly night air sent a spasm of pain, scarcely assuaged by seasons at Aix, darting along the small of his back, like a reminder or a warning. And he threw down the poet with a gesture of impatience, murmuring: "Old fool, get on with you." Then he went to bed again and blew out his light.

The next day he did not go to see the comtesse

and he even made a stern resolve not to go there for two days. But whatever he did, whether he tried to paint, or thought of going for a walk, or trailed his melancholy from house to house, he was everywhere pricked by the constant relentless memory of those two women.

Having forbidden himself to see them, he comforted himself with thinking about them; and he let his mind and his heart have their fill of memories. It often happened at those times that in the state of illusion into which his loneliness lulled him, the two faces drew near to one another, different from each other as he knew them; then they would pass one before the other, indissolubly blended, becoming one face, which was rather blurred — neither the mother's nor altogether the daughter's — but the face of a woman madly loved, once, still, and for always.

Then he regretted letting himself thus slide down the slope of these tender emotions that he felt to be powerful and fatal. To escape them, to throw them off and deliver himself from this rare and charming dream, he turned his mind upon every imaginable idea, upon every possible subject of reflection and meditation. All in vain! All the paths of distraction that he tried to follow brought him round to the same point where he discovered a fair and youthful countenance that seemed to have waited in ambush for him. A vague and inevitable obsession hovered over him, surrounded him and stood in his way by whatever side-track he attempted to escape it.

The confusion of these two beings, which had so

greatly disquieted him on the evening of their walk in the park at Roncières, began again in his memory as soon as he ceased reasoning and reflecting and called their image before him, in the effort to understand what strange emotion it was that shook his frame. He said to himself: "Come now, do I care more for Annette than I ought to do?" Then, delying in his heart, he felt it burning with love for a young woman who had all Annette's features, but who was not she. And he won a cowardly confidence from reflection: "No, I am not in love with the child. I am the victim of a resemblance."

Still, those two days spent at Roncières remained in his soul as a source of warmth and happiness and intoxication. The least details returned to him one by one, in all their exactitude, more delightful even than at the time. Suddenly, as he followed the track of his memories, he saw again the road they followed on leaving the cemetery and the girl going off to pick flowers. And he remembered with a start that he had promised her a cornflower in sapphires as soon as they got back to Paris.

All his resolutions took wings, and without struggling any longer, he took his hat and went out, quite excited by the thought of the pleasure he would give

The Guilleroys' footman answered, when he arrived:

"Madam is out, but Mademoiselle is at home."

He felt a lively thrill of joy.

"Tell her I should like to speak to her."

Then he stepped lightly into the drawing-room as though he were afraid of being heard.

Annette appeared almost immediately.

"Good morning, cher Maître," she said gravely. He laughed, shook hands with her, and then, sitting down by her, said:

"Guess what I have come for." She thought a few moments.

"I don't know."

"To take you with your mother to the jeweller's, to choose the cornflower in sapphires I promised you at Roncières."

The girl's face lit up with joy.

"Oh!" she said; "and mummy has gone out! But she will be coming back. You will wait, won't you?"

"Yes, if she is not too long."

"Oh, the impertinence! Too long, with me! You treat me as if I were a chit of a girl."

"Oh, no," he said, "not so much as you imagine."

He felt in his heart a desire to please, to be gallant and witty, as in the liveliest days of his youth: one of those instinctive desires that arouse all a man's powers of attraction, that incite peacocks to spread their tails and poets to write verses. The phrases came to his lips with a ready gaiety; and he talked as he could talk in his good moods. The child was excited by his animation and answered with all the malicious wit and all the mischievous subtlety that were wakening in her.

Suddenly, in the midst of a discussion of some

opinion, he exclaimed:

"But you have already said that several times, dear lady, and I have replied . . . "

She burst out laughing and broke in:

"Ah! You have stopped calling me 'child!' You take me for mummy."

He blushed and did not know what to say; then

he stammered:

"It is because your mother has argued that very

point with me a hundred times."

His eloquence was extinguished. He could think of nothing to say; and he was afraid of this young girl, afraid with a fear he did not understand.

"Here's mummy," she said.

She had heard the door of the first drawing-room open, and Olivier, embarrassed as if he had been caught doing something wrong, explained that he had suddenly remembered his promise and had come to take them both to the jeweller's.

"I have a brougham. I will sit on the spring-seat." They set out and a few minutes later went into

Montara's.

He had passed the whole of his life in the intimate observation, and the affectionate study, of women; he had always been concerned with them, had to probe for and discover their tastes, and be as well acquainted as they with matters of the toilet, questions of fashion, all the tiny details of their private lives, and he had come quite often to share certain of their sensations. And when he entered one of those shops where are sold the delightful and delicate adornments of their beauty, he always felt a thrill of pleasure, almost as sharp as the thrill that ran through them. Like them, he was interested in all the dainty trifles with which women deck themselves. Stuffs were pleasing to his eye. Laces attracted his hands. The most insignificant of elegant trinkets

held his attention. In the jeweller's he felt a touch of religious awe for their glass cases, as before the repositories of an opulent seduction; and the counter covered with dark cloth where the jeweller's supple fingers roll the precious, sparkling stones filled him with a certain respect.

After seeing the comtesse and her daughter seated in front of this austere piece of furniture on which each of them instinctively rested one hand, he explained what he wanted; and they showed him

models of little flowers.

Then they displayed some sapphires before them. of which four had to be chosen. It was lengthy business. The two women turned them over on the cloth with the tips of their fingers; then took them up gingerly, held them up to the light, and studied them with an expert and loving attention. After putting on one side those they had selected, they next had to choose three emeralds for the leaves, and then a tiny brilliant to tremble in the centre like a dew-drop.

Then Olivier, intoxicated with the joy of giving,

said to the comtesse:

"Will you give me the pleasure of choosing two rings?"

"Yes. One for you and one for Annette. Let me make you these little presents in memory of our two days at Roncières."

She declined. He insisted. A long discussion ensued, a contest of words and arguments, which

ended in a hard-won victory for him.

They produced the rings - some, the finer ones, alone in their own boxes, others marshalled according to kind in large square cases, where they displayed upon the velvet all the varying designs of their settings. The painter had seated himself between the two women; like them, and with the same eager interest, he began to pick up one by one the golden rings from the narrow slits where they were placed. Then he put them down in front of him, on the cloth of the counter, where they were piled up in two heaps — one of those rejected at first sight and another of those from which they would make their choice.

The time went by pleasantly and insensibly in the delightful task of choosing — most seductive of all the pleasures in the world, as absorbing and changing as a pageant, exciting too, almost sensual — the most exquisite joy a woman's heart can know. Then they compared them and grew very heated over it. At last, after some hesitation, the choice of the three judges rested on a little golden serpent clasping a lovely ruby between its slender throat and its twisted tail.

Olivier got up radiant.

"I will leave you my carriage," he said. "I have some errands to run. I must be off."

But Annette begged her mother to return on foot, on such a beautiful day. The comtesse consented and, after thanking Bertin, went off through the

streets, accompanied by her daughter.

They walked for some time in silence, savouring their pleasure in the presents they had been given. Then they began to talk of all the jewels they had seen and handled. The glitter and rattle and splendour of them seemed to linger in their heads. They

walked quickly through the five o'clock crowd that throngs the pavements on a summer's evening. Occasionally men would turn round to look at Annette and murmur, as they went by, vague expressions of admiration. It was the first time, since she had gone into mourning, since black had given her daughter so brilliant and radiant a beauty, that the comtesse had gone out with her in Paris. And little by little her heart contracted as she noticed this public success, the attention roused, the whispered compliments, and the little stir of admiration caused in a crowd of men by the passing of a pretty woman; it weighted her heart beneath the same painful heaviness as the other evening in her drawing-room, when they were comparing the child with her portrait. In spite of herself, she watched for the glances that Annette attracted, she felt them coming in the distance, brush past her face without resting there, and then suddenly fix themselves on the fair countenance walking by her side. She sensed and she saw in their eyes the swift mute homage rendered to this glowing vouth, to the seductive charm of this freshness; and she thought: "I was as pretty as she, if not prettier." Suddenly the thought of Olivier flashed across her mind; and, as at Roncières, she was seized with an imperious desire to run away.

She could not bear to remain any longer in this brilliant light, in this seething mass of people, seen by all these men who did not look at her. They were far away — and yet very recent — the days when she sought, when she challenged comparison with her daughter. And to-day which of these passers-by thought of comparing them? One man only had

perhaps thought of it just now, in the jeweller's shop? He? Oh! The horrror of it! His mind must be haunted continually by that comparison! He could not possibly see them together without thinking of it and recalling the time when she used to go to his house, so pretty, so fresh, so sure that she was loved!

"I don't feel well," she said. "We will take a cab,

my child."

Annette asked anxiously:

"What is the matter, mummy?"

"Oh, it is nothing. You know that since your grandmother's death I have been subject to these attacks."

AN obsession has the gnawing tenacity of an incurable disease. Once entered into a soul, it consumes it, and leaves it no more free to think of anything, to interest itself in anything, or to take pleasure in the least thing. Whatever she did, at home or elsewhere, alone or among people, the comtesse could not rid herself of the thought that had stabbed her as she walked home by her daughter's side. "Was it possible that Olivier, who saw them almost every day, should not be constantly haunted by the idea of comparing them?"

He must indeed do it in spite of himself, constantly; he too must be obsessed by a resemblance that could never for a moment be forgotten and was accentuated still more by their recent deliberate imitation of voice and gesture. Every time he came in, she thought immediately of this comparison; she could read it in his look, felt it, and stored it in her heart and in her brain. Then she was racked by the longing to hide herself, to disappear and never show

herself to him again by her daughter's side.

She suffered in an infinitude of ways, and no longer felt at home in her own house. That pain of dispossession which she had felt one evening when every eye looked at Annette standing beneath her portrait, became more acute and sometimes maddened her. She reproached herself continually with her urgent longing for deliverance, her desire to drive her daughter from her house, like a tiresome and tenacious guest. And with an unconscious skill she laboured to that end, driven by need to make an effort to keep with her still, in spite of all, the man she loved.

Unable to hasten on Annette's marriage, which their recent mourning a little further delayed, she was afraid, with a vague and overpowering fear, that something might happen to upset the plan; and almost in spite of herself she tried to instil an affection for the Marquis into her daughter's heart.

All the clever diplomacy she had used so long to keep Olivier assumed a new, more refined and more secret form; and strove to make the two young people fond of each other's company, while keeping

the two men apart.

As the painter never lunched out, owing to his habits of work, and usually gave up only his evenings to his friends, she often invited the Marquis to lunch. He would arrive, radiating the freshness of a ride on horseback, a sort of whiff of morning air. And he would talk gaily of all the social happenings that seem to hover every day over the autumnal awakening of the Paris that rides in gay splendour in the paths of the Bois. Annette liked listening to him and became interested in these little sensations of the day, that he brought her quite fresh and with something of a gay gesture. A youthful intimacy grew up between them, an affectionate good-fellowship that the passionate love of horses which they had in common naturally strengthened. When he had gone the comtesse and comte sang his praises very cleverly.

and said just sufficient about him to make the girl understand that it rested solely with her to marry him if she wanted.

She had indeed realised very quickly; and looking at the matter quite frankly, she saw no reason why she should not take as husband this handsome youngster who would give her, amongst other satisfactions, the one she preferred most of all that of galloping at his side every morning on a thoroughbred.

They became engaged one day, quite naturally, after a grasp of the hand and a smile; and people spoke of this marriage as of a thing long decided upon. Then the Marquis began to bring presents, whilst the Duchesse treated Annette as her own daughter. So the whole affair had been warmed up by common consent over a small flame of intimacy during the calm hours of daylight. And the Marquis, who had many other occupations and connexions, many other services and duties to render, rarely came in the evening.

Then came Olivier's turn. He dined regularly each week with his friends, and also contrived to appear suddenly for a cup of tea between ten and

twelve.

As soon as he came in, the comtesse looked at him keenly, tortured by her longing to know what was going on in his heart. Every look, every gesture, was immediately given a special meaning; and she was tormented by the thought: "It is impossible for him not to love her when he sees us both together."

He too brought presents. He never let a week pass

without appearing with two packages in his hand—one for the mother and the other for the daughter. And as she opened the boxes, that often contained gifts of some value, the comtesse would feel a pain at her heart. She well knew that desire to give which, since she was a woman, she had never been able to satisfy, that desire to bring something, to give pleasure, to buy something for somebody, to find in the shops the trinket that will please best.

Once before, the painter had known this state of mind; and she had often seen him come in with that same smile and that same gesture — a little package in his hand. Then it had cooled off, and now it was beginning again. For whose sake? She had no doubt

about it! It was not for hers.

He seemed tired and thinner. She concluded that he must be troubled. She compared his entrances, his looks and his way of behaving with the attitude of the Marquis who also was beginning to be roused by Annette's charms. There was no comparison: M. de Farandal was attracted, Olivier Bertin loved! So at least she imagined during her hours of pain; and then during her quieter moments she hoped still to find herself mistaken.

Oh, many a time she almost questioned him when she was alone with him, begged and besought him to tell her, to confess all and hide nothing from her. She would rather have known and wept in the certitude of her knowledge than suffered thus from doubt and from her inability to read clearly in that closed heart, in which she felt the growth of another love.

That heart to which she clung more than to life

itself, which she had watched over, warmed and animated by her love for twelve years; that heart of whose possession she had thought herself sure. which she had hoped to have won, conquered and subdued once and for all in a devotion that should last to the end of their days - that heart was now being taken from her by an inconceivable, horrible and monstrous fatality. Yes, it had suddenly closed itself against her with a secret locked in its depths. She could no longer find her way there by an affectionate word, or store her love there as in a safe retreat, open to her alone. What was the good of loving, and of surrendering oneself utterly, if on a sudden the man to whom one had given up one's whole being, one's whole existence, all that one had in the world, could thus, because another face had pleased him, elude your grasp and in a few days become almost a stranger?

A stranger! Him, Olivier? He spoke to her as before with the same words, with the same voice, and in the same tone. And yet there was something between them; something inexplicable, inapprehensible, invincible, almost nothing at all — that almost nothing that bears a sail away with the turning of

the wind.

And in truth he was being borne away — away from her — a little more every day, by every glance he cast at Annette. He himself did not try to see clearly within his heart. He could feel that welling up of love, that irresistible attraction; but he did not want to understand; he put his trust in events, in the unforeseen chances of life.

He no longer cared about anything but his dinners

and his evenings in the company of these two women, cut off by their mourning from all social functions. He saw at their house only indifferent faces — the Corbelles and Musadieu usually — and he imagined himself almost alone in the world with them. And as he rarely saw nowadays the Duchesse and the Marquis, for whom the mornings and the middle of the day were reserved, he strove to forget them, thinking the marriage postponed to an indefinite date.

Annette, moreover, never spoke of M. de Farandal in his presence. Was she moved by a sort of instinctive modesty or perhaps by one of those secret intuitions of the feminine heart that make them forebode what they do not know?

Week followed week without any change in this life. Autumn had come, bringing the session of the Chambers earlier than usual because of political

complications.

The day of the opening, the Comte de Guilleroy was to take to the sitting of Parliament Mme. de Mortemain, the Marquis and Annette, after they had first lunched at his house. Only the comtesse, alone in her ever-growing sorrow, had declared that

she would stay at home.

They had risen from the table and were drinking coffee in the big drawing-room. They were lively. The comte, glad to be back at the parliamentary labours which were his sole pleasure, talked almost wittily about the present situation and the difficulties of the Republic. The Marquis, decidedly amorous, answered him vivaciously, looking at Annette; and the Duchesse was almost equally happy in her

nephew's attraction and the government's embarrassment. The atmosphere of the drawing-room was warm with the first concentrated warmth of the reheated radiators — warmth of stuffs and carpets and walls in which the scent of the asphyxiated flowers quickly evaporates. In this closed room in which the coffee too gave off its aroma, there was something intimate, homely and contented, when the door opened to admit Olivier Bertin.

He stopped on the threshold, so astonished that he hesitated to come in, astonished as a deceived husband catching his wife in sin. A dull rage and a violent emotion took hold of him; and he knew that his heart was eaten out with love. All that had been hidden from him, all that he had hidden from himself, now appeared to him clearly, as he saw the Marquis installed in the house, an accepted

lover.

With a sudden shock of anger he realised all that he did not want to know and all that they did not dare to tell him. He did not wonder why he had been kept in ignorance of all these preparations for the marriage. He could guess it; and his eyes became hard as they met those of the comtesse, who blushed. They understood one another. When he had sat down, there was silence for a few minutes. This unexpected arrival had paralysed their flow of thought. Then the Duchesse began to talk to him; and he answered shortly, with a strange, suddenly altered ring in his voice.

He looked around him at these people who had started chatting again, and said to himself: "They have fooled me. They shall pay for it." Above all

he was angry with the comtesse and with Annette, into whose innocent dissimulation he now saw clearly.

The comte looked at the clock and exclaimed:

"Oh! Oh! It is time to be off."
Then he turned to the painter.

"We are going to the opening of the parliamentary session. Only my wife is staying behind. Will you come with us? I should be very pleased."

Olivier answered dryly:

"No, thank you. Your Chamber does not tempt me."

Annette came up to him and said, assuming the playful manner:

"Oh, but come, cher Maître. I am sure you will

amuse us much more than the deputies."

"No, really. You will enjoy yourselves quite well without me."

Realising that he was moody and low-spirited, she insisted by way of seeming kind.

"Do come, Mr. Artist. I assure you I really can't

do without you."

A few words escaped him so quickly that he could neither check them on his tongue nor modify their tone.

"Bah! You do without me as everyone else does, Mademoiselle."

A little surprised at his tone, she exclaimed:

"Very well then! There he is standing on ceremony again!"

He smiled one of those twisted smiles that reveal all the pain of a soul. Then with a slight bow:

"I must get into the habit of it one day or another."

"And why?"

"Because you will get married, and your husband, whoever he may be, will have the right to find such familiarity out of place in my mouth."

The comtesse hastened to say:

"It will be time enough then to think of that. But I hope Annette will not marry a man so touchy as to stand on his rights with regard to an old friend's intimacy."

The comte shouted:

"Come along, let us be going. We shall be late." And those who were to accompany him got up and went out with him after the usual handshakings and the kisses that the Duchesse, the comtesse and her daughter exchanged at every meeting as at every parting.

They remained alone, She and He, standing behind

the hangings of the closed door.

"Sit down, my dear," she said gently.

But he answered almost roughly: "No, thank you. I am going too."

She murmured beseechingly:

"Oh, why?"

"Because it is not my proper time, apparently. I beg your pardon for having come unexpectedly."

"Olivier, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I merely regret having upset a little party of your arrangement."

She seized his hand.

"What do you mean? They were just going because they are attending the opening of the session. I myself was staying behind. It was, on the contrary, quite inspired of you to come to-day when I am alone."

He grinned.

"Inspired? Oh, yes! I was inspired!"

She took hold of his wrists, and, looking into the depths of his eyes, murmured very softly:

"Confess that you love her."

He wrenched his hands away, no longer able to master his vexation.

"You're crazed with that idea!"

She took hold of him again by the arms, and, with her fingers clutching at his sleeves, supplicated him:

"Confess, Olivier, confess. I would rather know! I am certain, but I would rather know! I would rather! . . . Oh, you do not know what my life has become to me."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you want me to do? Is it my fault if

you lose your senses?"

She kept hold of him and drew him to the other drawing-room at the back, where they could not be heard. She dragged him by the cloth of his coat, clinging tight to him, gasping for breath. When she had brought him to the little round divan, she made him drop down on it, and then sat next to him.

"Olivier, my friend, my only friend, I beg of you, tell me you love her. I know it. I can feel it in all that you do. I cannot doubt it and it is killing me.

But I would know it from your mouth."

As he still struggled, she slipped down on her knees at his feet; and her voice rattled in her throat.

"Oh, my friend, my friend, my only friend, is it

true you love her?"

He cried out, trying to raise her up: "No, no. I swear to you it is not."

She stretched out her hand to his mouth and held it fast there to close it, stammering:

"Oh, do not lie. It hurts me too much."

Then she let her hand fall on the man's knees and sobbed.

He could see only the back of her neck and a great mass of fair hair streaked with many white hairs; and he was thrilled with a great pity and a great sorrow.

He seized this heavy head of hair in his hands and pushed it violently back, raising towards him two wild eyes streaming with tears. Then he pressed his lips many, many times to these brimming eyes, saying:

"Any! Any! My dear, dear Any!"

Then, trying to smile and speaking in that hesitating voice of a child choked with grief, she said:

"Oh, my friend, only tell me you love me still a

little."

He kissed her again.

"Yes. I love you, my dear Any."

She got up and sat next to him again, took his hands and looked at him. Then tenderly:

"It is so long that we have loved one another. It ought not to end like this."

Clasping her close to him, he asked:

"Why should it end?"

"Because I am old and Annette is too like what I was when you first knew me."

Then in his turn he closed her piteous mouth with

the tips of his fingers and said:

"Again! I beg you, speak no more of it. I swear to you you are wrong!"

She repeated:

"If only you just love me a little!"

He said again:

"Yes. I love you."

They stayed so for a long time without speaking, hand in hand, very moved and very sad.

At length she broke the silence by murmuring: "Oh, the hours that I have still to live will not be

very joyous."

"I will try to make them tender for you."

The dusk of a cloudy sky that comes two hours before twilight spread over the drawing-room and gradually enveloped them in the misty grey of autumn.

The clock struck.

"We have been here a long time," she said. "You ought to be going, for someone might come, and we

are hardly calm!"

He got up, clasped her to him and kissed her halfopen mouth as in earlier days. Then they walked through the two drawing-rooms arm-in-arm like husband and wife.

"Good-bye, my friend."
"Good-bye, my friend."

And the curtain fell back into place behind him.

He descended the stairs, turned in the direction of the Madeleine and began to walk without knowing what he did. He was stunned as by a blow, his legs were weak, and his heart hot and throbbing; like a burning rag shaken within his breast. For two hours, or three or perhaps four hours, he walked straight on, in something like a trance of mind and prostration of body, which left him just enough

strength to put one foot in front of the other. Then he went home to think.

So he loved this little girl! Now he could understand all that he had felt when near her, since the walk in Monceau Park, when he discovered on her lips the tones of a scarcely recognised voice, of the voice that once had stirred his heart; and then all that slow, irresistible reawakening of a love hardly extinguished and not yet grown cold, a love that he refused to admit to himself.

What was he going to do? What could he do? When she was married, he would refrain from seeing her often — that was all. Meanwhile he would continue to visit the house, to avoid rousing suspicions, and hide his secret from the world.

He dined at home — a thing he never used to do. Then he had the large stove in his studio lighted, for the night gave every prospect of being bitterly cold. He even ordered the chandelier to be lighted, as though he were afraid of the dark corners; and then he shut himself up. A strange, deep, physical, terribly sad emotion gripped him. He could feel it in his throat and his chest and in all his relaxed muscles, as well as in his fainting soul. The walls of the room seemed to crush him: all his life both as an artist and as a man was gathered here. Each painting that hung there recalled a success, each piece of furniture held a memory. But successes and memories were things of the past. His life? How short and empty and yet how full it seemed to him! He had painted pictures, more pictures, always pictures - and loved a woman. He remembered the evenings of spiritual exaltation, after their meetings, in

this same studio. He had walked whole nights through, with a fever in all his being. The joy of happy love, the joy of worldly success, the peculiar intoxication of fame had given him the enjoyment

of unforgettable hours of secret triumph.

He had loved a woman and this woman had loved him. At her hands he had received that baptism which reveals to a man the mysterious world of emotions and affections. She had opened his heart almost by force and now he could not close it again. Another love was entering in spite of him through that breach — another love, or rather the same love rekindled by a fresh face, the same increased by all the strength that this longing to worship gathers to itself with age. And so he loved this little girl. It was no use now to struggle, to resist or deny it. He loved her with the despairing knowledge that he would never receive the slightest pity from her, that she would never know his fearful suffering, and that another would marry her. At that thought that came again and again and would not be driven away, he was seized with an animal desire to howl aloud like a chained dog; like a chained dog he felt himself powerless, a slave and bound. His agitation increased as he thought about it; and he kept striding up and down the huge room that was lighted up as for a festival. At last, unable to bear the pain of this reopened love any longer, he decided to try and soothe it by the memory of his old love, to drown it in evoking his first great passion. He went and took from the cupboard where he kept it, the copy he had once made himself of the comtesse's portrait. Then he replaced it on his easel, sat down in front of it and looked at it. He tried to see her again, to find her again in life, such as when he had loved her long ago. But it was always Annette who rose up upon the canvas. The mother had gone, vanished, leaving in her place that other countenance so strangely like her own. It was the girl with her slightly brighter hair, her slightly more impish smile, her slightly more mocking air. And he knew that he belonged body and soul to that young creature as he had never belonged to the other, and as a foundering ship be-

longs to the waves.

Then he got up and turned the painting round, so that he should not see this apparition any longer. Then, feeling drowned in melancholy, he went into his bedroom to fetch the drawer from his bureau where slept all his mistress's letters, and he brought it back to the studio. There they were, as in a bed, one on top of the other, making a thick mattress of little thin pieces of paper. He plunged his hands in it, into all that prose that spoke of them, into that bath of their long relationship. He gazed at the narrow coffin of boards wherein lay the mass of heaped-up envelopes with his name, his name only, written upon them. And he reflected that a love, the tender affection of two beings one for the other, the story of two hearts, was told there, in that yellowed surge of papers sprinkled with red seals. And as he leant over them, he breathed in a waft from the past, the sad perfume of locked-up letters.

He wanted to read them again, and, rummaging at the bottom of the drawer, grasped a handful of the oldest. As he opened them, memories leaped forth from them, clear-cut and disturbing to his soul. He recognised many that he had carried about with him for whole weeks; and in every line of this little handwriting that said such tender things to him, he found again the forgotten emotions of other times. Suddenly his fingers encountered a delicate embroidered handkerchief. What was it? He pondered a few moments, and then remembered. One day at his house she had sobbed because she was a little jealous, and he stole from her, to keep it, her tear-drenched handkerchief.

"Oh, sad, sad things! Oh, poor, poor woman!

From the bottom of the drawer, from the bottom of his past, all these recollections rose up like a mist. It was only the impalpable mist of the vanished reality, yet it pained him; and he wept over these letters, as one weeps over the dead because they are no more.

But the stirring up of this old love sent a new and youthful ardour surging up within him — a flood of overwhelming tenderness that recalled to his mind's eye the radiant face of Annette. He had loved her mother with a passionate abandonment to a willing bondage. He was beginning to love this little girl like a slave, an old trembling slave on whom they rivet fetters that will never break again.

All this he could feel in the bottom of his being; and it terrified him.

He tried to understand how and why she thus possessed him. He knew her so little. She was scarcely a woman yet, and her heart and soul still slept the sleep of youth. As for him, he was now almost at his life's end! Then how had this child captivated him with a few smiles and a few strands

of hair? Oh, the smiles and the hair of this fair little girl made him want to fall on his knees and strike

his forehead on the ground.

Do we know — do we ever know — why a woman's face suddenly takes to itself the power of a poison over us? It is as though we have drunk it in with our eyes, that it has become our thought and our flesh. We are drunk and mad; and from that image we absorb, we draw our life; and of it we would die.

How we suffer sometimes from the fierce and incomprehensible power that the shape of a face possesses over the heart of a man!

Olivier Bertin had begun to walk again. The night was far gone and his stove was out. The cold outside was finding its way through the window-panes. Then he went to bed and continued until dawn thinking and in pain.

He was up early, knowing not why nor what he was going to do, his nerves in rags and irresolute as

a whirling weathercock.

As he sought for some distraction for his mind and some occupation for his body, he remembered that every week on that very day a few members of his club were in the habit of assembling at the Turkish Baths where they lunched after their massage. So he dressed quickly, hoping that the sweating-room and cold shower would calm him, and went out.

Immediately he stepped outside, a sharp cold assailed him, that first withering chill of the first frost that destroys in a single night the last remains of

summer.

All along the Boulevard, there was a thick shower

of big yellow leaves that fell with a frail dry sound. As far as the eye could see, from one end to the other of the broad avenues between the house-fronts, they were falling, as though every stalk had just been severed from the branches by the edge of a thin blade of ice. The causeways and pavements were already covered and looked for some hours like forest paths at the beginning of winter. All this dead foliage crackled under the feet, and sometimes, when the wind blew, it gathered together into little wayes.

It was one of those transition days that mark the end of one season and the beginning of another, and have a savour or a sadness peculiar to themselves — sadness of agony or savour of sap being born again.

As he crossed the threshold of the Turkish Bath, the thought of the warmth in which he was going to soak his flesh after this walk in the frozen air of the streets, gave Olivier's sad heart a thrill of satisfaction.

He undressed hurriedly, rolled round his waist the light cloth that an attendant gave him and disappeared through the padded door opened before him.

A warm oppressive breeze, that seemed to proceed from a distant hearth, made him breathe as though he lacked air, while he crossed a Moorish gallery, lit up by two oriental lanterns. Then a woolly-headed Negro dressed solely in a loin-cloth, with shining chest and muscular limbs, sprang before him to lift up a curtain at the other end; and Bertin entered the huge round sweating-room, lofty and silent, almost mystical as a temple. The light came from above, through the dome and through the trefoils

in coloured glass, into the great paved hall, with its tiled walls decorated in the Arabian style.

Men of every age, almost naked, were walking about slowly and sedately without speaking. Others were seated on little marble benches with their arms crossed. Others were talking in low tones.

The burning air made one pant as soon as one came in. There was something mysterious, some flavour of an earlier age, in that stifling ornamental arena, where human flesh was being heated and where black masseurs and Moors with copper-coloured legs ran all around.

The first face the painter saw was that of the Comte de Landa. He was walking round like a Roman wrestler, proud of his great chest and his huge arms crossed upon it. He was an habitué of sweating-rooms, where he imagined himself on the stage like an applauded actor, and judged with an expert's eye the disputed muscularity of all the strong men in Paris.

"Good morning, Bertin," he said.

They shook hands. Then Landa went on:

"Ha! Good weather for a sweat."

"Yes, magnificent."

"You have seen Rocdiane? He is over there. I went and fetched him as soon as I jumped out of bed. Oh! just look at that for a figure."

A little knock-kneed man went by with frail arms and meagre loins, making these two old patterns of human strength smile scornfully.

Rocdiane caught sight of the painter and came up

to them.

They sat down on a long marble table and began

to talk as though they were in a drawing-room. Attendants went round offering drinks. They could hear the smack of the masseur's hand on the bare flesh and the sudden spurt of the showers. And a continual splashing of water coming from every corner of the vast amphitheatre filled it too with a faint sound of rain.

Every minute a new-comer greeted the three friends or came up to shake hands. There were the big Duc d'Harisson, the little Prince Epilati, Baron Flach and others.

Suddenly Rocdiane said: "Hallo! Farandal!"

The Marquis came in, hands on hips, walking with the easy grace of a well-made man whom nothing ails.

Landa murmured:

"He is a real gladiator, that big fellow." Rocdiane went on, turning to Bertin:

"Is it true that he is marrying your friend's daughter?"

"I believe so," said the painter.

But that question, in front of that man, at that moment and in that place, sent a fearful spasm of despair and disgust through Olivier's heart. The horror of all the realities until then merely glimpsed, appeared to him in a single second with such blinding clearness that for some moment he struggled with an animal desire to hurl himself upon the Marquis.

Then he got up.

"I am tired," he said. "I am going to the massage, at once."

An Arab went by.

"Ahmed, are you at liberty?"

"Yes, Monsieur Bertin."

And he went off hastily to avoid shaking hands with Farandal, who was slowly making his way round the hammam.

He stayed scarcely a quarter of an hour in the large rest-hall so peaceful in its surrounding of cells where the beds are set round a plot of African plants with a jet of water spraying in the middle. He felt as though he were being followed and threatened; that the Marquis was going to join him and that he would have to stretch out his hand and treat him as a friend while he longed to kill him.

Before long he was on the Boulevard covered with dead leaves again. They were no longer falling: the last of them had been taken off by a prolonged gust. Their red and yellow carpeting shuddered and stirred, and went undulating from one pavement to the other beneath the stronger puffs of the rising breeze.

Suddenly a sort of bellowing came over the roofs, the wild-beast cry of the passing storm and at the same time a violent burst of wind that seemed to come from the Madeleine plunged headlong into the Boulevard.

The leaves, all the fallen leaves that seemed to be waiting for it, rose up as it drew near. They ran before it, gathering themselves in heaps and whirling wildly round, or flying up in spirals to the house-tops. It drove them like a flock, a mad flock that swept in flight towards the boundaries of Paris, towards the open sky of the suburbs. And when the great cloud of leaves and dust had disappeared on the

high ground of the Malesherbes district, the causeways and pavements remained bare, strangely clean

and swept.

Bertin wondered: "What is going to become of me? What am I going to do? Where am I to go to?" And he returned home, unable to think of anything.

A newspaper kiosk caught his eye. He bought seven or eight papers, hoping to find something to

read for an hour or two.

"I am lunching at home," he said on coming in.

And he went up to his studio.

But as he sat down he felt that he would not be able to stay there; for his whole body was filled

with the restlessness of an angry beast.

The papers he glanced over could not distract his soul for a moment; and the facts he read stayed in his eyes without even penetrating to his brain. In the middle of an article that he was not trying to understand, the word Guilleroy made him start. It was concerned with the sitting of the Chamber, where the comte had uttered a few words.

His attention, thus aroused to activity, next encountered the name of the celebrated tenor Montrosé, who was to give towards the end of December a single performance at the opera. It would be, the paper said, a magnificent musical occasion, for Montrosé, the tenor, who had left Paris six years before, had just returned from a series of unprecedented successes all over Europe and America, and he would, moreover, be accompanied by the famous Swedish singer, Helsson, who also had not been heard in Paris for five years.

Suddenly Olivier conceived an idea that seemed to spring to birth at the bottom of his heart; he would give Annette the pleasure of this spectacle. Then he reflected that the comtesse's mourning would be an obstacle to this plan, and tried to devise means for carrying it out nevertheless. Only one was presented itself. He would have to take a stage box where the occupants were almost invisible, and, if the comtesse was still unwilling to come, have Annette accompanied by her father and the Duchesse. In that case, it would be to the Duchesse that he would have to offer the box. And then he ought to invite the Marquis too.

He hesitated and pondered for a long time.

Certainly, the marriage had been decided upon, settled even beyond all doubt. He guessed his friend's eagerness to bring it to a conclusion, and realised that she would bestow her daughter upon Farandal at the earliest possible date. There was nothing he could do about it. He could neither prevent nor change nor postpone this frightful event. Since he had to submit to it, was it not better to master his soul, to hide his pain, to appear happy, and refuse to let himself be carried away, as just now, by the violence of his emotions?

Yes; he would invite the Marquis, thus allaying the comtesse's suspicions and providing for himself

a friendly door within the young household.

Immediately after lunch, he went along to the opera to make sure of obtaining one of the boxes hidden behind the curtain. It was promised to him. Then he hastened to see the Guilleroys.

The comtesse appeared almost at once. She was

still quite moved by their affectionate scene of the day before.

"How delightful of you to come again to-day!"

she said.

He stammered out:

"I have brought you something."

"What?"

"A stage box at the opera for a special appearance of Helsson and Montrosé."

"Oh! my dear, what a pity! and my mourning?"

"Your mourning will soon be four months old."

"I assure you I can't come."

"And Annette? Just think; such a chance will perhaps never occur again."

"With whom shall she go?"

"With her father and the Duchesse, whom I intend to invite. I also intend offering a place to the Marquis."

She looked into the depths of his eyes and a wild desire to kiss him rose to her lips. She repeated,

unable to believe her ears:

"To the Marquis?"

"Why, yes!"

And she immediately agreed to that arrangement. He went on indifferently:

"Have you settled the date of their marriage?"

"Oh, yes, very nearly. We have various reasons for hurrying it on as much as possible; the more so as it was already decided on before Mother's death—you remember?"

"Yes, perfectly. And when will it be?"

"At the beginning of January. I am sorry I did not tell you sooner."

Annette came in. He felt his heart leap in his breast like a spring, and all the affection that impelled him towards her turned suddenly to bitterness and gave birth within him to that strange sort of passionate hostility that love becomes beneath the lash of jealousy.

"I have brought you something, Mademoiselle,"

he said.

She answered:

"Then we are definitely decided upon 'Made-moiselle'?"

He assumed a paternal air.

"Listen, my child. I am quite aware of the event that you are preparing for. I assure you that this formality will be essential in a little while. Better at once than later."

She shrugged her shoulders pettishly, while the comtesse said nothing, looking into the distance, her thoughts in suspense. Annette asked:

"What have you brought me?"

He told her of the performance and the invitations he proposed to make. She was delighted and, jumping on his neck with the agility of a little guttersnipe, kissed him on both cheeks.

He felt himself swooning, and realised, as this little mouth with its fresh breath twice lightly brushed his face, that he would never be cured.

The comtesse, horrified, said to her daughter: "You know your father is waiting for you."

"Yes, mummy, I am going."

She disappeared, still blowing kisses from her finger-tips.

As soon as she was gone, Olivier asked:

"Are they going to travel?"

"Yes for three months."

And in spite of himself he murmured:

"So much the better!"

"We will resume our former life," said the comtesse.

He stammered out:

"I hope so."

"In the meanwhile do not neglect me."

"No, my darling."

The emotion he had displayed the day before on seeing her weep, and the idea he had just expressed of inviting the Marquis to this performance at the

opera, restored to the comtesse a little hope.

It was short-lived! A week had not passed before she began to trace anew on this man's face, with an agonising and jealous care, all the stages of his torment. She could be unaware of none of it, for she herself was going through all the tortures that she guessed at in him; and Annette's constant presence reminded her, every moment of the day, of the futility of her efforts.

Everything came to overwhelm her at once, years and mourning. The quick, subtle, ingenious, coquetry that throughout her life had made her triumphant in his sight, was paralysed by the black uniform that emphasised her pallor and the change in her features, just as it made her daughter's youthfulness more dazzling. She was already far from the date which was yet so recent, of Annette's return to Paris, when she proudly sought to contrive in their toilets a likeness that was then to her advantage. Now she longed to tear from her body the garments of death that tortured her and made her plain.

If she had felt that she had all the resources of elegance at her service, and if she had been able to choose and wear materials of delicate shades that harmonised with her complexion, and would have imparted to her fading charm a studied power, as captivating as her daughter's passive grace, she would no doubt have managed to remain the more attractive of the two.

She knew so well the effect of those aphrodisiac evening gowns and of those soft, sensuous morning gowns — the intriguing half-undress worn for lunch with intimate friends, which until midday envelops a woman with a sort of savour of her uprising, the warm physical sensation of the bed she had left and of her scented room.

But what could she attempt in this sepulchral dress, in this convict's garb, that would cover her for a whole year? A year! She would remain a year imprisoned in this black, inactive and vanquished. For a whole year, she would feel herself getting older day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, in this shroud of crape. What would she be in a year, if her poor, ill body continued to change thus in the anguish of her soul?

These thoughts never left her now, spoiled all that she would have taken pleasure in, made a penance of all that would have been a joy, and left her no happiness, no gladness, no gaiety unmixed. She quivered with the constant wild desire to shake off the weight of misery that crushed her; for without this harassing obsession, she would have been so happy still, so lively and well. She felt fresh and gay of soul, youthful in heart; she felt the ardour of a

being that is just beginning to live, an insatiable greed for happiness, even more voracious than before,

and an all-consuming desire to love.

And now all the good things, all the tender, delightful, poetical things, that make life lovely and pleasant, were departing from her, because she had grown old. It was all over! Yet she still felt within her the affections and the passionate yearnings that she had known as a young girl, and as a young woman. Nothing had grown old but her flesh, but her miserable skin — that covering of the bones, gradually withered and eaten away, like the cloth on the woodwork of a piece of furniture. The haunting terror of this decay had become part of herself almost a physical pain. The rooted idea had given birth to a sensation in the skin's surface, the sensation of growing old, continual and perceptible like the sensation of heat or cold. Indeed she thought she could feel, like an obscure itching, the slow progress of the wrinkles on her forehead, the slackening of the tissue of cheeks and throat, and the multiplication of those innumerable little marks that spoil the tired skin. Like one sick of a consuming disease who is compelled by a constant tickling to scratch himself, the realisation and the dread of this horrible and meticulous work of swift-moving time roused in her soul the irresistible desire to assure herself of it in every glass. They called to her, attracted her, forced her to come with staring eyes and see and see again with perpetual recognition, and touch with her finger, as though the better to ascertain it, the irreparable toll of years. At first it was an intermittent idea, recurring every time that she saw, either at home or elsewhere, the polished surface of the dreaded crystal. She would stop on the pavement to look at herself in the shop windows, as though fastened by a hand to every plate of glass with which the shopkeepers adorn their fronts. Then it became a disease, an obsession. She began to carry in her pocket a tiny ivory box of *poudre de riz*, the size of a nut, with an invisible mirror on the inside of the lid; and often while she walked she would hold it open in her hand and raise it to her eyes.

When she sat down, to read or write in the tapestryhung drawing-room, her mind, distracted for a moment by this fresh task, soon returned to the single interest. She struggled against it, tried to divert her attention from it, to think of other things, to get on with her work. It was all in vain. The prick of desire tormented her; and soon her hand would drop a pen and stretch out irresistibly towards the little mirror with the handle of old silver that lay on her desk. In the oval chiselled frame her whole face was enclosed like a face of former times, like a portrait of the last century, like a once fresh pastel faded by the sun. Then, after looking at herself for a long time, she would wearily replace the little object on the desk and compel herself to concentrate on her work again: but before she had read two pages or written twenty lines, the desire to look at herself surged up again invincible and torturing; and again she would stretch out her hand to take up the mirror.

She handled it now like a tiresome and familiar trinket from which one cannot keep one's fingers, used it every moment while receiving friends, worked herself up till the tears came to her eyes, and hated

it as though it were a person, while she turned it this way and that in her hand.

One day, maddened by this contest between herself and the piece of glass, she flung it against the

wall, where it cracked and fell to pieces.

But a little later her husband, who had had it mended, gave it back to her more shining than ever. She had to take it and thank him, resigning herself to its possession.

Every evening too and every morning shut in her room, she fell again in spite of herself to her patient, accurate examination of the hateful, silent process

of destruction.

In bed she could not sleep, lit her candle again, and stayed with open eyes, reflecting that sorrow and sleeplessness hastened on irreparably the terrible task of fleet-footed time. In the silence of the night she listened to the pendulum of her clock whose regular monotonous tick-tack seemed to murmur: "Going—going—going": and her heart shrivelled up in such a spasm that with her bed-clothes over her mouth she moaned for very despair.

Formerly, like everyone else, she had been aware of the passing of the years and of the changes they bring. Like everyone else she said — said to herself — each winter, spring or summer: "I have changed a great deal since last year." But since she was still beautiful, with a slightly different beauty, she was not disturbed by it. To-day, suddenly, instead of remarking tranquilly the slow progress of the seasons, she had just discovered and realised the awful flight of the moments. She had had suddenly revealed to her the swift gliding of the hours, that impercep-

tible passage maddening to think upon, that infinite procession of little hurrying seconds that nibble at the body and life of men.

After these wretched nights, she used to drowse long and more peacefully between the warm bed-clothes when her maid had drawn the curtains and lighted the morning fire. She remained weary and somnolent, neither awake nor asleep, in a state of mental numbness that permitted the rebirth in her of that instinctive providential hope wherefrom men's hearts and smiles derive their life and brightness in the last day.

Every morning now, as soon as she had got out of bed, she felt an overpowering desire to pray to God and obtain from Him a little relief, a little comfort.

Then she would kneel down before a large oaken Christ, a rare work that Olivier had discovered and given to her, and with closed lips, uttering her prayer in that voice of the soul with which one speaks to oneself, she poured out towards the Divine Martyr a piteous supplication. Beside herself with the longing to be heard and succoured, artless in her distress like all the kneeling faithful, she could not doubt that He listened, that He was attentive to her request and perhaps touched by her pain. She did not ask Him to do for her what He has never done for anyone - to leave her till death with her charm, her freshness and her elegance; she asked Him only for a little rest, for a short respite. She had indeed to grow old, as she had to die. But why so quickly? Some women kept their beauty so long. Could He not grant her to be one of those? How kind He would be, He who had also so greatly suffered, if He allowed

her just two or three years more such remnants of charm as were necessary for her to please!

She did not say these things, but she moaned them towards Him, in the inarticulate complaint of

her whole being.

Then she got up and sat down before her toilettable, and with a concentration of thought as eager as when she prayed, manipulated powders, pastes, pencils, puffs and brushes, that gave her back a plaster beauty, fragile and ephemeral. N the Boulevard there were two names in every mouth: "Emma Helsson" and "Montrosé." The nearer one got to the opera, the more often one heard them repeated. Huge posters, too, fixed to the Morris columns, flung them at the eyes of the passers-by; the air was full of the excitement of a great occasion.

The heavy building, which has received the title of "National Academy of Music," crouching under the black sky, displayed to the public thronging before it its pompous whitish front and the marble colonnade in its gallery, lit up by invisible electric

lamps like the scenery of a stage.

In the square, republican guards on horseback directed the traffic, and innumerable carriages arrived from every corner of Paris, giving a glimpse, behind their lowered windows, of a creamy mass of

transparent gowns and pale faces.

The coupes and landaus filed into the reserved arcades and stopped for a few moments to let the society women and others get out in their evening cloaks trimmed with fur or feathers or priceless lace—precious bodies divinely adorned.

All the way up the famous staircase it was like moving in fairyland — a continuous stream of women clad like queens, with throat and ears flashing with diamonds, and long dresses trailing on the steps.

The auditorium was filled early, for they did not want to miss a single note of the two celebrated artists. All throughout the huge amphitheatre, beneath the glaring electric light falling from the chandelier, there was a noise of people taking their places

and a great buzz of voices.

From the stage-box already occupied by the Duchesse, Annette, the comte, the Marquis, Bertin and M. de Musadieu, they could see nothing but the parts behind the scenes where men were talking, running about and shouting: workmen in blouses, gentlemen in evening dress, and actors in costume. But behind the huge lowered curtain could be heard the deep babel of the crowd; and they could feel the presence of a mass of seething, excited humanity, whose animation seemed to pierce the canvas and make its way even to the scenery.

They were going to play Faust.

Musadieu told anecdotes of the first performances of this work at the Théâtre Lyrique, of the semifailure followed by a dazzling success, of the original artists and their way of singing each piece. Annette, half turned towards him, listened with that greedy, youthful curiosity with which she embraced the whole world. And now and again she cast an affectionate glance at her fiancé, who was to be her husband in a few days' time. She loved him now, in the way an artless heart does love — that is to say, she loved in him all her hopes for the morrow. The intoxication of the first real parties in her life and the ardent desire to be happy made her tremble with joy and expectation.

And Olivier, who saw all, who knew all and had

plumbed all the depths of secret, impotent, jealous love, right to the very crucible of human pain, where the heart seems to crackle as it were flesh on burning coals, remained standing at the back of the box

enveloping them both in his tortured gaze.

The three blows were struck, and suddenly the little dry tapping of a wand on the conductor's desk cut short all the rustlings, coughings and whispers. Then after a short profound silence the first bars of the overture rose and filled the theatre with the invisible and irresistible mystery of music: music that penetrates into the body and maddens nerves and soul with a poetic, sensuous fever, as it blends with the clear air we breathe, a wave of sound that falls on our ears.

Olivier sat down at the back of the box, painfully moved, as though the notes had touched the wounds of his heart.

But when the curtain went up, he stood again, and saw in a setting supposed to represent an alchemist's

study, Doctor Faust plunged in thought.

He had heard this opera twenty times already and knew it almost by heart. His attention wandered immediately from the stage and concentrated itself upon the audience. He could only see a little corner behind the framework of the stage hiding his box; but this corner rising up from stalls to gods displayed to him a whole section of the public, where he recognised several faces. In the stalls, the men in the white ties ranged side by side, seemed a very museum of familiar faces — society men, artists, journalists, all those of every class who never fail to appear where everyone is present. In the circle and the boxes he

named and pointed out mentally the women he saw. The Comtesse de Lochrist in a front stage-box was truly ravishing, while a little way away the newly married Marquise d'Ebelin was already adjusting her glasses. "A charming first appearance," said Bertin to himself.

The audience was listening with rapt attention and evident enjoyment to the lamentations of

Montrosé, the tenor, upon life.

Olivier thought "How delightfully absurd! There is Faust, Faust the mysterious and sublime, singing the awful weariness and emptiness of all things; and this crowd anxiously wondering whether Montrosé's voice has not altered."

Then 'he listened like the others; and behind the conventional words of the libretto, through the music that stirs such profound visions in the depths of the soul, he had a sort of revelation of the way in which Goethe dreamed Faust's heart.

He had read the poem once and thought it very fine without having been greatly moved by it; and now suddenly he felt the unfathomable depth of it; for it seemed to him that that evening he was becoming himself a Faust.

Leaning slightly on the ledge of the box, Annette listened with all her ears; and murmurs of delight began to ripple through the audience, for Montrosé's voice was better pitched and fuller than before.

Bertin had closed his eyes. For a month all that he saw, felt or met in life had immediately become for him a sort of accessory to his passion. He made of the world or of himself a feeding-ground for this obsession. Everything beautiful or rare that he saw,

everything delightful that he conceived, he offered in mental sacrifice to his little friend; and had no single thought that he did not refer to his love.

Now, in the depths of his being he listened to the echo of Faust's lamentations; and the longing for death rose up in him, the longing to be rid thus of his sorrows, of all the misery of his fruitless passion. He looked at Annette's delicate profile, and saw the Marquis de Farandal seated behind her looking at it too. He felt old, done with, ruined. Oh! You have no more hope, no more expectations, not even the right to desire! To feel oneself out of the running, in the decline of life, like a superannuated servant whose career is brought to a close! Oh, the torture of it!

There was a thunder of applause; Montrosé was already winning his laurels. And Mephisto Labar-

rière sprang up from the ground.

Olivier, who had never heard him in this part, became interested again. The memory of Aubin, so dramatic with his deep bass voice, and then of Faure, so alluring with his baritone, rose up to distract him for a few moments.

But suddenly a phrase sung by Montrosé with an irresistible power, stirred him to the heart. Faust was saving to Satan:

"I'd have a treasure that contains them all: I would have vouth."

And the tenor appeared in silken doublet, his sword at his side, with a feathered cap on his head, graceful, young and handsome - with the mannered beauty of a singer.

A murmur ran through the theatre. He was very good-looking and pleased the women. Olivier, on the other hand, had a shock of disappointment, for the poignant image that Goethe's dramatic poem had evoked disappeared in this transformation. There was nothing now before his eyes but a fairy full of pretty songs, and a few talented actors whose voices alone he heard. He did not like this man in the doublet, this pretty boy with the roulades, who displayed his thighs and his notes. It was not the true, the irresistible and sinister chevalier Faust, he who was to seduce Marguerite.

He sat down again and the phrase he had just

heard came again into his mind:

"I'd have a treasure that contains them all:
I would have youth."

He murmured it between his teeth, sang it mournfully in the depths of his soul; and with his eyes continually fixed on the back of Annette's white neck rising in the square projection of the box, he realised all the bitterness of this impossible desire.

But Montrosé had concluded the first act so perfectly that the enthusiasm knew no bounds. For several minutes the sound of applause, of stamping feet and bravos, rolled through the theatre like a storm. In every box women were seen beating their gloves one against the other, whilst the men standing behind them shouted and clapped their hands.

The canvas fell and rose twice without the excitement abating. Then, when the curtain was lowered for the third time, separating the audience from the

stage and the inner boxes, the Duchesse and Annette still went on applauding a few moments and were thanked specially by a discreet little bow from the tenor.

"Oh, he has seen us," said Annette.

"What a wonderful artist!" exclaimed the Duchesse.

And Bertin, who had leaned forward, watched with mingled irritation and contempt the triumphant artist disappear between two supports, swaggering slightly, with leg outstretched and hand on hip, in

the careful pose of a theatre hero.

They began to talk about him. His successes caused as great a stir as his genius. He had gone through every capital, hailed with ecstasy by the women, who knew beforehand that he was irresistible, and whose hearts fluttered immediately they saw him come on to the stage. People said he did not much care about this sentimental delirium and contented himself with musical triumphs. In very veiled terms, because of Annette, Musadieu told the life story of this handsome singer; and the Duchesse, who was enraptured, understood and approved all the mad passions he had been able to inspire. She found him so alluring, so graceful and distinguished, and such a remarkable musician. And she ended up with a smile:

"Besides, how could one resist a voice like that?"

Olivier got annoyed and was bitter. He really did not understand how anyone could conceive a liking for that strolling player, for that perpetual mimicry of human characters that are never his; that illusory personification of men dreamed of, that

nocturnal painted manikin who plays every part at

so much the evening.

"You are jealous of them," said the Duchesse. "You others, you society men and artists, you all bear a grudge against the actors, because they are more successful than you."

Then she turned to Annette.

"Come, my child, you who are just entering upon life and see with unclouded eyes, what do you think of this tenor?"

Annette answered with an air of conviction:

"I like him very much."

The three blows were struck for the second act, and the curtain rose on the *Kermesse*.

Helsson's passage was superb. Her voice too seemed to have become fuller than before, and she controlled it with a greater accuracy. She had indeed become the great outstanding, exquisite singer whose fame in the world equalled that of Bismarck or M. de Lesseps.

When Faust sprang towards her, when he said to her in his bewitching voice those so delightful words:

"Will you not let me, fair my lady, Lend my arm to lead the way?"

and when the fair-haired Marguerite, so pretty and so appealing, answered him:

"No, sir, I am nor fair nor lady, Nor need any arm to lead the way,"

the whole audience was stirred with a great thrill of pleasure.

The applause when the curtain fell was deafening;

and Annette went on so long that Bertin wanted to take hold of her hands to make her stop. His heart was wrung by fresh torment. He did not speak during the interval. With his mind full of the obsessing idea that was now touched to hate, he followed behind the scenes, followed into his dressing-room, where he could see him whitening his cheeks, the odious singer who was exciting the child so.

Then the canvas went up on the "Garden" act.

All at once something like an amorous ecstasy ran through the audience, for never before had this music, which seemed to be just the breath of kisses, found such interpreters. They were no longer two celebrated actors, Montrosé and Helsson. They were two creatures of the ideal world, scarcely two creatures, but two voices: the eternal voice of the man who loves, and the eternal voice of the woman who yields. And together they sighed out all the poetry of human love.

When Faust sang:

"Let me, oh! let me look upon thy face."

there was such an accent of adoration, joy and supplication in the notes proceeding from his mouth, that in truth the desire to love swelled every heart.

Olivier remembered that he had himself murmured that line in the park at Roncières beneath the castle windows. Till then, he had thought it a little banal, and now it rose to his lips like a last passionate cry, a last prayer, the last hope and the last kindness that he could look for in this life.

Then he listened no more, heard no more. A sharp

pang of jealousy rent his heart, for he had just seen Annette raise her handerkerchief to her eyes.

She was crying! So her heart was awakening, was stirring and being moved, her little woman's heart that as yet knew nothing. There quite near him, with no thought of him, she was being initiated into the way in which love can overwhelm a human being—and this initiation, this revelation, had come to her from that wretched strolling player who was singing.

Oh! He no longer bore a grudge against the Marquis de Farandal, that fool, who saw, knew and understood nothing. But how he cursed the man in tights who was bringing light to this young girl's

soul!

He wanted to fling himself upon her, as if he were flinging himself on somebody about to be crushed by a run-away horse, to seize her by the arm, and to take her, drag her away, and say to her: "Let us go.

Let us go. Let us go, I beg you."

How she listened! How thrilled she was! And how he suffered! He had already known such suffering, but in a less cruel form. He remembered it, for all the pains of jealousy are awakened like reopened wounds. The first time was at Roncières as they returned from the cemetery, when he first felt that she was escaping him, that he had no power over her, over that little girl as independent as a young animal. But there, when she annoyed him by going away to pick flowers, he felt chiefly the crude desire to stop her flights, to keep her body near him. To-day it was her soul that fled away, intangible. Oh, the gnawing anger that he had just felt again —

he had often felt it before at all the little bruises we do not admit to ourselves and which seem to leave perpetual blue marks on a lover's heart. He remembered all the painful stings of petty jealousy that fell upon him in little blows, day in, day out. Every time that she had noticed, admired, loved or desired something, he had been jealous of it; jealous of everything, constantly and imperceptibly, of all that took up Annette's time or was the object of her glance, her attention, her joy, astonishment, or affection. For it all took something of her from him. He had been jealous of all that she did without him. of all that he did not know about, of her goings out, of her reading, of all that seemed to give her pleasure: jealous of an officer heroically wounded in Africa and of whom Paris was full for the space of a week; of the author of a much praised novel; of a young unknown poet he had never seen, but whose verses Musadieu recited; of all the men, in fact, who were praised before her even conventionally. For when a man loves a woman, he cannot bear without pain that she should even think of anyone with an appearance of interest. His heart is quickened by the imperious desire to be alone in the world in her eyes. He wants her to see, to know, to appreciate none other. And as soon as she seems on the point of turning to look at or recognise somebody, he throws himself in front of her gaze, and if he can neither divert it nor absorb it altogether, then he suffers to the depths of his soul.

Olivier suffered in this way from the sight of this singer who seemed to radiate love and draw it to himself throughout the amphitheatre; and he was angry with everyone for the tenor's triumph, with the women he saw thrilled with passion in the boxes, and with the men, the idiots deifying the fool.

An artist! They called him an artist, a great artist. And he had his successes, this mountebank, interpreter of an alien thought, such as no creator had ever known! Oh! That was just like the justice and intelligence of society people, of those ignorant and pretentious amateurs for whom the masters of human art labour till death. He watched them applauding, going into ecstasies; and the old hostility, always simmering at the bottom of his heart, the proud heart of the self-made man, stirred again and became a wild rage against the imbeciles who are all-powerful by the sole right of birth and money.

He remained silent until the end of the performance, consumed by his thoughts. Then, when the final tempest of enthusiasm had died down, he offered his arm to the Duchesse whilst the Marquis took Annette's. They went down the great staircase in the midst of a flood of men and women, in a sort of slow and magnificent cascade of bare shoulders, rich dresses and black coats. Then the Duchesse and the young girl with her father and the Marquis got into the same landau, and Olivier Bertin remained alone with Musadieu in the Place de l'Opéra.

Suddenly he felt in his heart a sort of affection for this man — or rather the natural attraction one feels towards a compatriot met in a far-off country. For he felt lost now in that alien indifferent mob, whilst with Musadieu he could still talk of her.

So he took him by the arm.

"Don't go home immediately," he said. "It is a pleasant night; let us take a stroll."

"Willingly."

They went off towards the Madeleine in the midst of the nightly crowd, through the short violent midnight bustle that animates the Boulevards when the

theatres are emptying.

Musadieu's head was full of a thousand different things, all his subjects of conversation for the moment — what Bertin called his menu du jour; and he poured forth his eloquence on the two or three themes that were interesting him most. The painter let him run on without listening, confident of bringing him soon to speak of her. And he walked on without seeing anything about him, imprisoned in his love. He walked on, exhausted by the spasm of jealousy that had bruised him like a fall, and overwhelmed by the knowledge that there was nothing left for him to do in the world.

He would go on suffering in this way, more and more, with nothing left to hope for. He would live out empty days, one after another, watching her from afar, living, being happy, loved and doubtless loving also. A lover! Perhaps she would have a lover as her mother had had. He felt within him so many various and complex sources of pain, such a sea of troubles, so many inevitable wounds — he felt so abandoned, so entered past hope now upon a path of unimaginable agony — that he could not conceive that anyone had suffered like himself. And he suddenly thought how foolish were those poets who have invented the vain toil of Sisyphus, Tantalus's grievous thirst, and the devouring of Prometheus's heart!

Oh! if they had imagined, if they had probed into the wild love of an old man for a girl, how would they have expressed the horrid secret labour of a being that can no more inspire love, the torments of barren desire, and, more terrible than any vulture's beak, a little fair face eating into an aged heart?

Musadieu was still talking; and Bertin interrupted him, murmuring almost in spite of himself beneath

the influence of his obsession.

"Annette was charming this evening."

"Delightful; yes."

The painter continued, to prevent Musadieu taking up the broken thread of his ideas:

"She is prettier than her mother was."

Olivier made a great effort to keep him there, and, scheming to fasten him to it by one of Musadieu's favourite hobbies, went on:

"She will have one of the most fashionable drawing-

rooms in Paris after her marriage."

That was enough; and the Inspector of Fine Arts, thorough society man as he was, began to give his expert estimate of the position that the Marquis de Farandal would occupy in French society.

Bertin listened to him, and envisaged Annette in a large brilliantly lighted drawing-room, surrounded by men and women. And this vision too made him

jealous.

They went up the Boulevard Malesherbes. When they passed in front of the Guilleroys' house, the painter raised his eyes. Lights seemed to be shining in the windows, through the chinks in the curtains. The suspicion occurred to him that the Duchesse and her nephew had been invited to drink a cup of tea. And he was stabbed by a spasm of anger that hurt him horribly.

He still kept hold of Musadieu's arm, and occasionally stimulated his opinions on the future young Marquis by contradicting him. That ordinary voice speaking of her made her image hover round them

in the night.

When they had arrived at the painter's door in the Avenue de Villiers, Bertin asked:

"Are you coming in?"

"No, thanks! It is late; I am going to bed."

"Oh, come up for half an hour, and we can chat a little longer."

"No. Really it is too late."

The idea of being alone, after the shocks he had just endured, filled Olivier's soul with horror. He had hold of someone, and he would keep him.

"No, come up. I want you to choose a study that I have been anxious to give you for a long time."

The other, knowing that painters are not always in a giving mood, and that the remembrance of promises is short, snatched at the opportunity. In his capacity as Inspector of Fine Arts, he owned a gallery that had been collected with skill.

"I am at your disposal," he said.

They went in.

The valet was roused and brought grogs; and the conversation dragged along for some time on the subject of painting. Bertin showed Musadieu some

studies, begging him to take the one he liked best. And Musadieu hesitated, disconcerted by the gaslight that deceived him as to the colouring. In the end he chose a group of little girls skipping on a pavement; and almost immediately he wanted to go off with his present.

"I will have it left at your house," said the painter.

"No. I would rather have it this evening, so that

I can admire it before going to bed."

Nothing could restrain him, and Olivier Bertin found himself once more alone in his house, that prison of his memories and of his painful disquietude.

When the servant came in next morning with tea and papers, he found his master seated on the bed, looking so pale that he was frightened.

"Are you ill, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, it is nothing; a slight indisposition."

"You would not like me to get you something, sir?"

"No. What sort of a day is it?"

"It is raining, sir."
"Good. That's all."

The man put the tea things and the public news

sheets on the usual little table, and went out.

Olivier took up the Figaro and opened it. The leading article was entitled "Modern Painting." It was a dithyrambic eulogy of four or five young painters, who, while gifted with real qualities as masters of colour, exaggerated them for effect and pretended to be revolutionaries and reformers of genius.

Like all the older school, Bertin felt angry at these new-comers, was annoyed by their ostracism of him, and disputed their doctrines. So he began to read this article with the rising irritation that springs so readily in a nerve-racked heart. Then he glanced lower down and saw his own name. And these few words at the end of a sentence smote him like the blow of a fist full in the chest: "the old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin."

He had always been sensitive to criticism and praise alike. But in the depths of his consciousness, despite his legitimate vanity, he suffered more from opposition than he delighted in praise: the result of the self-diffidence that his hesitations had always fostered. Formerly, however, in the days of his triumphs, the swingings of the censer were so numerous as to make him forget the pin-pricks. To-day, with the incessant cropping up of new artists and new admirers, compliments became rare and disparagement more marked. He felt himself enrolled in the battalion of the old painters of talent whom the young ones do not treat as masters. And as he was as intelligent as clear-sighted, he was pained equally nowadays by the least insinuations and by open attacks.

But never had any wound to his pride as an artist made him bleed thus. He was left gasping, and reread the article to grasp its finest shades of meaning. He and a few of his colleagues were thrown on the dust heap with an outrageous levity. And he got up murmuring the words that were still upon his lips:

"the old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin."

Never had like melancholy, like discouragement, like sensation of the end of all, of the end of his physical and intellectual being, plunged into such

despairing agony of soul. He remained till two o'clock in an arm-chair before the fire-place, his legs stretched out towards the hearth, incapable of moving or of doing anything at all. Then the longing for consolation arose in him, the longing to clasp loving hands, to see loyal eyes, to be pitied, comforted and caressed by friendly words. So he went, as always, to see the comtesse.

When he came in, Annette was alone in the drawing-room, standing up with her back towards him, hurriedly scribbling the address on a letter. On the table, just beside her, the Figaro lay open. Bertin saw the paper at the same time as the girl, and stopped in confusion, not daring to come forward. Oh! supposing she had read it! She turned round. She was busy and in a hurry, her mind preoccupied by a woman's cares, and said to him:

"Oh! How do you do, Mr. Artist? Excuse me if I leave you. The dressmaker is upstairs calling for me. The dressmaker, you know, is important when one is being married. I will lend you mummy, who is arguing and discussing with the designer. If I want her, I will send and beg her of you for a few minutes."

And she disappeared, half running, to show what

a hurry she was in.

This sudden departure without an affectionate word or tender look for him who loved her so much . . . oh, so much . . . left him overwhelmed. Then his eye rested again on the *Figaro* and he thought: "She has read it. People mock me and contradict me. She no longer believes in me. I am no longer anything to her."

He took two steps towards the paper, as one walks

up to a man to give him a blow. Then he said to himself: "Perhaps she has not read it, however. She is so busy to-day. But they will undoubtedly speak of it in her presence at dinner this evening, and make her want to read it."

With an instinctive, almost unconscious movement, he took hold of the paper, folded it up and slid

it into his pocket with the haste of a thief.

The comtesse came in. As soon as she saw Olivier's contorted and livid face she knew that he was going

through the extremities of suffering.

She sprang towards him with all her poor soul so tortured too, with all her poor body so bruised itself. She put her hands on his shoulders and said, looking into the depths of his eyes:

"Oh, how unhappy you are!"

This time he no longer denied it, and, his throat shaken by convulsive jerks, he stammered out:

"Yes . . . yes . . . yes!"

She felt that he was going to cry and drew him into the darkest corner of the drawing-room, towards two arm-chairs hidden by a little screen of old silk. They sat there behind this thin embroidered wall, enveloped in the grey shadows of a rainy day.

She went on, most pitying him, and afflicted by

his sorrow:

"My poor Olivier, how it hurts you!"

He rested his white head on his friend's shoulder.

"More than you can imagine," he said.

She murmured very sadly:

"Oh, I knew it, I have felt it all. I saw it being born and growing up."

He answered, as though she had accused him:

"It is not my fault, Any."

"I know it. . . . I do not blame you."

And softly, turning slightly, she put her lips to one of Olivier's eyes and found there a bitter tear. She started as though she had just drunk a drop of despair, and repeated many times:

"Oh, my poor . . . poor . . . poor friend!"
Then, after a moment's silence, she added:

"It is the fault of our hearts which have not grown

old. Mine is so much alive."

He tried to speak and could not; for sobs strangled him. She could hear a choking sound in his breast, quite close to her. Then, seized again by the selfish pain of love that had so long consumed her, she said in the agonising tones of one announcing some terrible disaster:

"My God! How you love her!"

Again he confessed: "Yes. I love her."

She thought a few moments, and then went on:

"You never loved me like this."

He did not deny it, for he was passing through one of those hours that call out whole truth, and murmured:

"No. I was too young then."

She was surprised.

"Too young? Why?"

"Because life was too sweet. It is only at our age that one loves with the love of despair."

She asked him:

"Does what you feel towards her resemble what you felt towards me?"

"Yes and no . . . and yet it is almost the same

thing. I loved you almost as much as a man can love a woman. And her I love like you, since it is you. But this love has become something irresistible, destructive, stronger than death. I belong to her, as a burning house belongs to the fire."

She felt her compassion withering in a gust of

jealousy, and said consolingly:

"My poor friend! In a few days she will be married and go away. When you have ceased to see her, you will undoubtedly get better."

He shook his head.

"Oh, I am lost . . . lost!"

"No. No. You will be three months without seeing her. That will be enough. Three months has been long enough, at any rate, for you to love her more than me, whom you have known twelve years."

Then, in the depths of his agony, he implored her:

"Any, do not desert me."
"What can I do, my dear?"
"Do not leave me alone."

"I will come and see you as often as you like."
"No. Keep me here, as much as possible."

"You will be near her."

"And near you."

"You must not see her again before her marriage."

"Oh! Any!"

"Or, at any rate, very little."
"Can I stay here this evening?"

"No, not in your present state. You must amuse yourself, go to the club or the theatre — no matter where — but you cannot stay here."

"I beg you."

"No, Olivier, it is impossible. And besides I have some people to dinner whose presence would upset you still more."

"The Duchesse? And . . . him . . . ?"

"Yes."

"But I spent yesterday evening with them."

"To think of it! Much better you are for it to-day!"

"I promise you I will be calm."

"No, it is impossible."
"Then I'll be going."

"What makes you in such a hurry?"

"I must walk."

"That is right! Walk far, walk till nightfall, kill yourself with weariness and then go to bed."

He got up.

"Good-bye, Any."

"Good-bye, dear friend. I will come and see you to-morrow morning. Shall I be very discreet, as in the old days, and pretend to lunch here at twelve and come to lunch with you at a quarter past one?"

"Oh, yes, do. How kind you are to me!"

"Because I love you."
"I too, I love you."

"Oh, don't talk of that any more."

"Good-bye, Any."

"Good-bye, dear friend. Till to-morrow."

"Good-bye."

He kissed her hands one after the other, then he kissed her temples, then the corner of her lips. As he was going out he took hold of her, enveloped her altogether in his arms, and, resting his mouth upon

her forehead, seemed to drink in and inhale all the love she had for him.

Then he went away very quickly without turning round.

When she was alone, she dropped into a chair and sobbed. She would have remained like that till nightfall, had not Annette come in suddenly to look for her. To give herself time to dry her red eyes the comtesse answered:

"I must just write a short note, my child. Go upstairs again, and I'll be with you in a second."

Until evening she had to busy herself with the great question of the trousseau.

The Duchesse and her nephew were dining with

the Guilleroys, a family party.

They had just sat down to the table and were still talking about the performance of the day before, when the butler came in with three enormous bouquets.

Mme. de Mortemain cried out in astonishment:

"Heavens, what is all that?"

Annette exclaimed:

"Oh, how lovely! Who can have sent them?"

Her mother answered:

"Olivier Bertin, no doubt."

Ever since he had gone she had been thinking of him. He had seemed so sad, so tragical. She saw so clearly his unending sorrow; and she felt so bitterly the rebound of his pain. She loved him so much, so dearly, so utterly, that her heart was crushed under a weight of gloomy forebodings.

They found in fact three of the painter's cards in the three bouquets. He had written on each in

pencil the names of the comtesse, the Duchesse and Annette.

Mme. de Mortemain inquired:

"Is he unwell, your friend Bertin? I thought he looked very ill yesterday."

And Mme. de Guilleroy answered:

"Yes, he makes me a little anxious, although he never complains."

Her husband added:

"Oh, he is getting old, like us. In fact he is ageing fast just now. I think bachelors break up all of a sudden, too. They go to pieces more quickly than other people. He really has changed a great deal."

The comtesse sighed:

"Yes!"

Farandal suddenly stopped whispering with Annette to remark:

"There was a very nasty article about him in the

Figaro this morning."

Every attack, every criticism, every disparaging allusion to her friend's talent, sent the comtesse into a passion.

"Oh," she said, "men of Bertin's worth need not

bother about such vulgarities."

Guilleroy was amazed:

"What! A nasty article about Olivier? I did not read it. On what page?"

The Marquis informed him.

"On the first page — a leading article entitled 'Modern Painting."

And the deputy's astonishment subsided.

"Quite so. I did not read it, because it was about painting."

Everyone smiled, knowing that outside politics and agriculture, M. de Guilleroy had no very great interests.

Then the conversation went off to other subjects, until they went into the drawing-room for the coffee. The comtesse did not listen, scarcely answered, haunted by her anxiety to know what Olivier could be doing. Where was he? Where had he dined? Where was he dragging now his incurable heart? She felt a sharp pang of regret for having let him go and not kept him with her. And she imagined him roaming about the streets, so sad, homeless and solitary, fleeing from the sorrow that enveloped him.

Until the Duchesse and her nephew left she scarcely spoke, lashed as she was by vague superstitious fears. Then she went to bed and stayed with eyes open in

the darkness, thinking of him.

A very long time had passed when she thought she heard the door-bell ringing. She started up, listening. For the second time, the vibrating tinkling sound broke upon the night.

She jumped out of bed and pressed the electric bell savagely to waken her maid. Then, candle in

hand, she ran into the hall.

She asked through the door:

"Who is there?"

An unknown voice answered:

"It is a letter."

"A letter. From whom?"

"From a doctor."
"What doctor?"

"I don't know. There's been an accident." Hesitating no longer, she opened the door and

found herself confronted by a cab-driver with a shiny hat. He held in his hand a piece of paper that he gave to her. She read: "Very urgent. . . . Monsieur le Comte de Guilleroy."

She did not recognise the handwriting.

"Come in, my good man," she said. "Sit down and wait for me."

Outside her husband's room, her heart began to beat so violently that she could not call out. She knocked on the wood with her metal candlestick. The comte was asleep and did not hear.

Then, out of patience and hysterical, she kicked

the door and heard a sleepy voice asking:

"Who's there? What time is it?"

She answered.

"It is I. I have an urgent letter for you brought by a coachman. There has been an accident."

He stammered from the depths of his curtains:

"Wait . . . I'm getting up. . . . I'm coming."

And after a moment's pause, he appeared in his dressing-gown. At the same time two servants ran up, awakened by the ringing. They were scared and dumbfounded, having seen a stranger sitting on a chair in the dining-room.

The comte had taken the letter and was turning

it over in his fingers, murmuring:

"What can it be? I can't imagine."

She said feverishly: "Read it then!"

He tore open the envelope, unfolded the paper, uttered a cry of horror and looked at his wife with panic-stricken eyes.

"My God! What is it?" she said.

He stammered, scarcely able to speak, so acute was his distress.

"Oh! a terrible catastrophe! . . . a terrible catastrophe! . . . Bertin has fallen under a carriage."

She cried out:

"Dead!"

"No! No!" he said. "See for yourself."

She snatched from his hands the letter he gave her, and read:

"DEAR SIR,

"A terrible disaster has just occurred. Our friend, the celebrated artist, M. Olivier Bertin, has been knocked down by an omnibus, the wheel going over his body. I cannot yet give a definite opinion on the probable consequences of this accident, which may not be serious or may have immediate and fatal results. M. Bertin urgently begs you and Mme. Ia Comtesse de Guilleroy to come at once. I hope, sir, that Mme. Ia Comtesse and yourself will be so kind as to grant the request of our mutual friend, who may not be alive when to-morrow comes.

"Dr. de Rivil."

The comtesse looked at her husband with wideopen, staring, terrified eyes. Then suddenly, like an electric shock, she felt a rush of the woman's courage that sometimes makes women, in an hour of trial, the most valiant of beings.

She turned to her maid:

"Quick. I am going to get dressed!"

The maid asked:

"What does Madame want to put on?"

"No matter. Whatever you like."

"Jacques," she pursued, "be ready in five minutes."

As she returned to her room, her mind reeling, she saw the coachman who was still waiting, and said to him:

"You have got your cab with you?"
"Yes, Madame."

"Good. We will take it." Then she ran to her room.

Madly, with violent movements, she flung on her clothes, hooked, pinned, tied, fastened them on any way. Then, standing in front of her glass, she gathered up her hair, twisting it up, not caring how; and stared, this time without thinking of them, at her pale face and haggard eyes in the mirror.

When she had got her cloak on her shoulders, she rushed towards her husband's room. He was not vet

ready, and she dragged him out.

"Come," she said. "Remember that he may be

dying."

Scared, the comte followed her, stumbling and feeling the dark staircase with his feet, trying to

make out the steps to avoid falling.

The journey was short and silent. The comtesse trembled so violently that her teeth chattered, and through the window she could see the street lamps rushing by, all misty with rain. The pavements glistened, the Boulevard was deserted and the night ominous. When they arrived they found the painter's door left open and the concierge's room lighted up and empty.

At the top of the staircase the doctor-Dr. de Rivil - a little man whose hair was turning grey, came forward to meet them. He was short, stout, very spick and span and very polite. He bowed low to the comtesse and stretched out his hand to the comte.

She asked him, breathing hard as though the ascent of the steps had exhausted all the breath in her lungs:

"Well, doctor?"

"Well, Madame, I hope it will be less serious than I thought at first."

She cried out:

"He is not going to die?"

"Oh, no! At least I don't think so."

"Can you answer for that?"

"No. I merely say that I hope to be confronted with an ordinary contusion of the stomach without internal lesions."

"What do you mean by lesions?"

"Tears."

"How do you know he has none?"

"I only suppose it."
"And if he had?"

"Then it would be more serious."

"Might he die then?"

"Yes."

"Very soon?"

"Very soon. In a few minutes or even a few seconds. But reassure yourself, madam; I am certain he will be all right again in a fortnight."

She had listened with profound attention, in the effort to know and to understand everything. She

went on:

"What sort of a tear might he have?"

"Well, in the liver, for instance."

"And that would be very dangerous?"

"Yes... but I should be surprised if any complications supervened now. Let us go in to him. That will do him good; he is waiting for you very

impatiently."

The first thing she saw on going into the room was a dead-pale face on a white pillow. A few candles and the fire in the hearth illuminated it, outlined the profile, and threw the shadows into relief; and in this livid face the comtesse saw two eyes watching her come in.

All her courage, all her energy, all her resolution gave way. For this hollow, distorted face was like that of a dying man. He, whom she had seen a little while ago, had become this thing, this spectre! She murmured between her lips: "Oh, my God!" and walked towards him, trembling with horror.

He tried to smile, to comfort her, and the grimace

resulting from the attempt was terrifying.

When she was quite near the bed, she placed her two hands gently on Olivier's hand, that lay stretched along his body, and stammered:

"Oh, my poor friend."

"It is nothing," he said softly without moving his head.

She was looking at him now, horrified by the change in him. He was so pale that he seemed to have not a drop of blood left beneath his skin. His cadaverous cheeks looked as though they were being sucked in to the interior of his face, and his eyes too were sunken as if something were drawing them inwards.

He saw his friend's terror and sighed:

"Here's a pretty state I'm in."

She said, still looking fixedly upon him:

"How did it happen?"

He had to make great efforts to speak, and every now and then his whole face quivered with nervous

spasms.

"I did not look about me. . . . I was thinking of something else . . . of something quite different . . . yes . . . and an omnibus knocked me down and ran over my stomach. . . ."

As she listened to him, she could see the accident. Then, her heart swelling with horror, she

asked:

"Did you bleed?"

"No. I am only a little bruised . . . a little crushed."

She said:

"Where did it happen?" He replied very softly:

"I don't exactly know. It was a long way away."

The doctor pushed forward an arm-chair into which the comtesse sank. The comte remained standing at the foot of the bed, repeating between his teeth:

"Oh, my poor friend — my poor friend — what a

terrible misfortune!"

And he really was greatly distressed, for he was very fond of Olivier.

The comtesse continued:

"But where did it happen?"

The doctor answered:

"I don't quite know myself, or rather I can't understand it. It was at Les Gobelins, almost outside Paris. At least the cab-driver who brought him back declared that he had taken him up at a chemist's shop in that district, where he had been carried, at nine in the evening."

Then, leaning towards Olivier:

"Is it true the accident happened near Les Gobelins?"

Bertin closed his eyes as though trying to remember, then murmured:

"I don't know."

"But where were you going?"

"I don't remember. I was just going straight on."

A groan that she could not check escaped the comtesse's lips. For a few moments her emotion choked her and kept her breathless. Then she drew her handkerchief from her pocket, covered her eyes

with it and began to cry dreadfully.

She knew: she could imagine it all. Something crushing and unbearable had just fallen upon her heart: remorse that she had not kept Olivier with her, that she had driven him away, cast him forth into the street, where, drunk with sorrow, he had stumbled beneath that carriage.

He said to her in his now toneless voice:

"Don't cry. It hurts me."

By a terrible effort of will, she stopped sobbing, uncovered her eyes and gazed at him unflinching, without a tremor moving her face, down which the tears continued slowly flowing.

They looked at one another, and the longing to speak to one another, to hear those thousand sad, secret things they had yet to say, sprang irresistibly to their lips. She felt that at all costs she must get

rid of the two men behind her, that she must find a way, a stratagem, an inspiration — she, the woman of resource. And she began to think, her eyes always fixed upon Olivier.

Her husband and the doctor were talking in low voices. They were discussing the measures to be

taken for looking after him.

She turned her head and said to the doctor:

"Have you got in a nurse?"

"No, I prefer to send a house surgeon, who can watch the case better."

"Send both. One can never take too many precautions. Can you procure them to-night? For I imagine you won't stay here till the morning."

"As a matter of fact, I am just going home. I

have been here four hours already."

"But on your way you will send the nurse and

house surgeon."

"It is rather difficult in the middle of the night. However, I will try."

"You must."

"They will promise perhaps, but will they come?"

"My husband will go with you and bring them back willy-nilly."

"But you cannot stay here all alone, madam."

"I!..." she exclaimed with a sort of cry of defiance and indignant protest against all opposition to her will. Then she set forth, with that authoritative eloquence to which one cannot reply, all the exigencies of the situation. It was essential to have a nurse and a home surgeon within an hour, to guard against all accidents. To get them, someone must rouse them from their beds and bring them. Her

husband alone could do that. Meanwhile she would remain by the sick man — she whose duty and whose right it was. She was merely fulfilling her rôle as friend and as woman. Besides, she wished it and no one could dissuade her from it.

Her argument was reasonable. There was no gain-

saying it, and the others decided to obey.

She had risen, her whole mind fixed on the thought of their departure, feverishly anxious to feel them at a distance and to be left alone. And now, so that she should not do anything foolish during their absence, she listened to the doctor's orders, in an effort to understand, to remember all and forget nothing. The painter's valet standing beside her listened too; and behind him his wife, the cook, who had helped with the first bandaging, indicated by signs of the head that she too had understood. After reciting all these instructions like a lesson, the comtesse urged the two men to go, saying repeatedly to her husband:

"Come back quickly, above all, come back

quickly."

"I will take you in my coupé," the doctor said to the comte. "It will bring you back sooner. You

will be here again in an hour."

Before going the doctor made another long examination of the wounded man to assure himself that his condition was still satisfactory.

Guilleroy still hesitated, and said:

"You do not think it unwise to do this?"

"Oh, no! There is no danger. He only needs rest and quiet. Mme. de Guilleroy will please not let him talk and will talk to him as little as possible."

The comtesse was filled with consternation and answered:

"Then I must not talk to him?"

"No, madam. Take an arm-chair and stay near him. He will not feel lonely and will be comforted. But nothing to tire him, no talking, not even thinking. I shall return about nine in the morning. Goodbye, madam — my most humble duty."

He departed, bowing low, followed by the comte

saying:

"Don't be anxious, my dear. I shall be back in

an hour and you will be able to go home."

When they had gone, she listened for the noise of the door downstairs being shut and then the rumbling of the coupé going off down the street.

The cook and the manservant had stayed in the

room waiting for orders. She dismissed them.

"You may go. I will ring if I want anything."
They departed too, and she remained alone beside him.

She had come quite close to the bed; and, placing her hands on the edges of the pillow, on either side of that beloved head, she leant forward to look at him. Then, so near to his face that she seemed to breathe the words upon his skin, she asked:

"You threw yourself beneath that carriage?"

He answered, trying to smile:

"No, it was the carriage that threw itself on top of me."

"It is not true. It was you."

"No, I assure you, it was the carriage."

After a few moments' silence, those moments in

which two souls seem to meet and mingle in a glance, she murmured:

"Oh! my dear, dear Olivier, to think that I let

you go, that I did not keep you with me!"

He answered with conviction:

"It would have happened to me all the same, one day or another."

They looked at each other again, trying to read

their most secret thoughts. He went on:

"I don't think I shall recover. I am in too great pain."

She stammered:

"You are in very great pain?"

"Yes."

Leaning forward a little further, she brushed his forehead and then his eyes and then his cheeks with slow kisses light and gentle as a soothing hand. She scarcely touched him with her lips, making that little breathing sound that children make when they kiss. And that went on for a long time. He let this rain of soft and tender caresses fall upon him; and it seemed to quieten and refresh him, for his contorted face quivered less than before.

Then he said:

"Any?"

She stopped kissing him to listen.

"What, my dear?"

"You must make me a promise."
"I promise you anything you want."

"If I am not dead before day, swear to me that you will bring Annette, once, just once! I should so dearly like to see her before I die. . . . Think that . . . to-morrow . . . at this time . . . I shall

perhaps . . . I am sure I shall have closed my eyes for ever . . . and that I shall never see you again . . . neither you . . . nor her. . . . "

She stopped him, her heart torn.

"Oh! be silent . . . be silent. . . . Yes, I promise to bring her."

"You swear it?"

"I swear it, my dear. . . . But be silent, talk no more. You distress me terribly . . . be silent."

A violent convulsion contorted all his features.

Then, when it was gone, he said:

"If we have only a few minutes to be together, do not let us lose them; let us make use of them to say good-bye. I have loved you so much."

She sighed.

"And I . . . as I love you still."

He continued:

"All my happiness has been due to you. Only these last days have been hard. . . . It is not your fault. . . . Oh, my poor Any . . . how sad life is sometimes . . . and how difficult it is to die . . . "

"Be silent, Olivier. I beg you." He went on, without hearing her.

"I should have been such a happy man, if you had not had your daughter. . . ."

"Be silent. . . . Oh, my God! Be silent."

He seemed to be thinking rather than talking to her.

"Ah! He who invented this life and made man was very blind, or very wicked. . . . "

"Olivier, I beg you. . . . If you have ever loved

me, be silent . . . don't speak like that."

He looked at her as she leaned over him, so livid

herself that she too looked as though she were dying, and he was silent.

Then she sat down on the arm-chair quite near his bed, and took hold again of his hand stretched out on the counterpane.

"Now, I forbid you to speak," she said. Don't

move, and think of me as I think of you."

They started to look at one another again, motionless, joined together by the burning contact of their flesh. From time to time she gently pressed that feverish hand she clasped within her own, and he answered these summonses by slightly closing his fingers. Each of these pressures said something to them, called forth a portion of their dead past, and awoke in their mind the slumbering memories of their love. Each of them was a secret question, each of them a mysterious answer, sad questions and sad answers, those "Do-you-remember's?" of an old passion.

At this death-bed meeting, perhaps to be their last meeting, their thoughts flew back across the years through all the story of their love. And the only sound in the room was the crackling of the fire.

Suddenly he said, as though awakening from a

dream and with a start of terror:

"Your letters!"

She asked:

"What about my letters?"

"I might have died without destroying them."

She cried out:

"Oh! And what of it? Little that matters. Let them find them and read them, I do not care."

He answered:

"I do not wish it. Get up, Any. Open the drawer at the bottom of my desk, the big drawer. They are all there. You must take them and put them in the fire."

She did not move, and sat there in agony of mind as though he had bidden her do something cowardly.

He went on:

"Any, I beg you. If you don't do it, you will torture me, exasperate me, madden me. Think that they might fall into anyone's hands, into the hands of a solicitor, of a servant — even of your husband. I do not wish . . ."

She got up, still hesitating, and saying:

"No; it is too hard, too cruel. I feel as though you were making me burn our two hearts."

He besought her, his face distorted with pain.

Seeing him in so great agony, she resigned herself and walked towards the bureau. When she opened the drawer, she saw it full to the brim with a thick layer of letters heaped up one upon the other. And she recognised on all the envelopes the two lines of the address that she had so often written. She knew them — those two lines — the name of a man and the name of a street — as well as her own, as well as anyone can know the few words that have represented in life the sum of hope and the sum of happiness. She looked at them, those little square objects that contained all her love that she could express, all that she could tear from herself to give him, with a little ink, on white paper.

He had tried to turn his head on the pillow to

watch her; and he said again:

"Burn them quickly."

Then she took two handfuls of them and kept them for a few moments in her fingers. They seemed heavy, mournful, alive and yet dead; so many different things were hid therein — finished things, sweet things, felt and dreamed. It was the soul of her soul, the heart of her heart, the essence of her being that she held there. And she remembered with what ecstasy she had scribbled some of them, with what exaltation, what intoxication of living, of loving someone, and expressing her love.

Olivier repeated:

"Burn them, Any, burn them."

With the same movement of both hands, she flung into the hearth the two bundles of papers that scattered as they fell upon the wood. Then she grasped others from the desk and threw them on top, then others, with rapid movements, bending down and straightening herself again brusquely, in order to finish her dreadful task with the utmost speed.

When the fire-place was full and the drawer empty, she remained standing, waiting, and watching the almost stifled flame creep up the sides of this mountain of envelopes. It attacked their edges, gnawed their corners, ran along the border of the paper, went out, took hold again and became stronger. Soon, all round the white pyramid there was a shining girdle of bright flame that filled the room with light. And this light that illumined the woman standing up and the man upon the bed, was their love being turned to ashes.

The comtesse turned round, and in the brilliant glare of this bonfire she saw her friend leaning forward, haggard, on the edge of the bed.

He asked:

"Are they all there?"

"Yes, all."

But before returning to him, she threw a last glance towards this work of destruction, and over the mass of papers already half consumed, twisting and blackening, she saw something red flowing. It looked like drops of blood. They seemed to spring from the very heart of the letters, from each letter, as from a wound; and they glided slowly towards the flame, leaving in their wake a purple trail.

The comtesse's soul received a shock as of mortal fear; and she started back, as though she had seen someone murdered. Then she understood, suddenly understood, that what she had just seen was only

the wax of the seals melting.

Then she went back towards the wounded man, gently raised his head, and replaced it carefully in the middle of the pillow. But he had moved, and the pains became more violent. He was breathing heavily, his face drawn by the intensity of his agony, and he seemed unconscious of her presence now.

She waited till he had calmed a little, until he should raise his eyes that were so obstinately closed,

and be able to speak again.

At last she asked him: "Are you in great pain?"

He did not answer.

She leant over him and placed a finger on his forehead to make him look at her. And he did indeed open his eyes — wild, delirious eyes.

Terrified, she repeated:

"Are you in pain? . . . Olivier! Answer me! Do

you want me to call? . . . Try, say something to me! . . . "

She thought she heard him stammer: "Bring her! . . . you swore to me."

Then he moved beneath the bed-clothes, his body contorted and his face convulsed and grimacing.

She repeated:

"Olivier, my God! Olivier, what is the matter with you? Shall I call? . . . "

He had heard her this time, for he answered:

"No. . . . It is nothing."

He seemed indeed to calm down, to suffer less and to fall suddenly into a sort of drowsy torpor. Hoping he was going to sleep, she sat down by the bed, took hold of his hand again and waited. He moved no more, chin on breast, and mouth half opened by the short, quick breaths that seemed to rasp his throat as they came. Only his fingers moved every now and then, in slight unconscious spasms that the comtesse felt to the very roots of her hair and that pierced her till she almost screamed. They were no longer the little voluntary pressures that told, for their weary lips, all the sadness of their hearts, but unallayable convulsions that spoke only of the tortures of the body.

And now she was afraid, dreadfully afraid, and felt a wild longing to go away, to ring, to call someone, but she did not dare to move, lest she should trouble his rest.

The distant noise of the vehicles in the street came through the walls; and she listened to hear whether the rumbling of the wheels was stopping before the door, whether her husband was returning

to deliver her, to snatch her away from this awful colloguy.

As she tried to free her hand from Olivier's he clasped it, uttering a deep sigh. Then, so that she should not disturb him, she resigned herself to wait.

The fire was dying in the hearth, beneath the black ashes of the letters; two candles guttered out; a

piece of furniture cracked.

Everything was silent in the house, everything seemed dead, except the tall Dutch clock on the staircase, which regularly chimed the hours, the half-hours and the quarters, singing out into the night the passage of time, with the modulation of its various notes.

The comtesse, still unmoving, felt an intolerable terror growing up in her soul. Nightmares assailed her; fearful thoughts troubled her brain; and she thought she felt Olivier's fingers growing cold within her own. Was it true? No, surely! Whence, then, came this sensation of an indefinable, icy touch? She got up, wild with panic fear, to look at his face. — It was relaxed, impassible, lifeless, indifferent to all unhappiness, calmed suddenly by Eternal Oblivion.

The translation of the story in this volume is by Storm Jameson, edited and seen through the press by Ernest Boyd.



A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

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This Book has been set, (on the Monotype,) in Suburban French type. This series was cut at the suggestion of J. Horace McFarland of the Mount Pleasant Press, who was impressed with its appearance in a French book. The Roman bears a marked resemblance to the letter of Philippe Grand jean (Royal Printer to Louis XIV) as shown in a magnificent folio printed by Grand jean at the Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1702, but the basic design was probably originated by the Didot foundry, famous printers of Paris (circa. 1713–1800). Suburban French is classified as an Old Style letter, but possesses many modern characteristics, and is transitional in feeling.



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